

THE POLITICS OF WATER SUPPLY:  
THE HISTORY OF CAPE TOWN'S WATER SUPPLY  
1840-1920

SUBMITTED FOR A MASTER OF ARTS DEGREE  
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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the development of Cape Town's water supply between 1840 and 1920. The thesis examines the effect that the augmentation water supply had on municipal politics and the development of the municipality of Cape Town.

It is argued that the high cost of water supply, arising out of Cape Town's geographic situation, had a major impact on its municipal government. In the nineteenth century the dominant class was divided between merchants who wanted water and the rentier classes who had to pay for it. In the subsequent political struggle for control of the municipality, the working class, which supported the rentier class were alienated. As a result they resisted municipal improvement, delaying a solution to the water problem until the twentieth century.

Chapter One examines the period from 1840 to 1900 where water supply was related to attempts to bring about municipal and sanitation reform. While this succeeded, by the late 1890's ratepayers reacted against excessive municipal spending, ultimately to the detriment of planned water schemes in the hinterland.

Chapter Two argues that in the period between 1900 and 1910 businessmen attempted to link water supply to the unification of the municipalities of the Cape Peninsula. This resulted in a struggle between the city and the suburbs for over the control of the water resources of the hinterland.

Chapter Three examines municipal unification in 1913 and the repercussions it had for water supply. The focus falls on a municipal referendum in 1917 in which the class divisions of half a century were a factor in the choice of a hinterland water scheme.

The dissertation concludes that water is important for explaining class divisions in municipal politics. It is suggested that the impact of water on municipal history is not unique, but in Cape Town's experience it was prolonged and intense. A further conclusion is that it affected the process of municipal unification between 1902 and 1913, shaping the form of the modern city.

A wide range of sources were used including municipal archive material and government reports and commissions. Newspapers and cartoons have been used extensively as they were instruments in the struggle for reform. Comparisons are drawn with the experience of overseas cities in an attempt to provide a coherent model for understanding the place of water supply in urban history.

The dissertation represents an attempt to provide a better understanding of Cape Town's history during this period and therefore relates municipal history to wider political, economic and social changes taking place. It also complements recent histories on sanitation, race and municipal politics which fall in this period.



## PREFACE

The original topic selected for this dissertation concerned the relationship between Cape Town and its hinterland with regard to its food and water supply circa 1900. In the course of initial research it rapidly became apparent that Cape Town's water supply problem formed a major subject on its own. Apart from an abundance of material documenting the physical development of the city's dams and water supply schemes, articles from contemporary newspapers revealed that the issue of water supply was an important part of the political life of the municipality. It soon became obvious that there was a strong connection between water supply and municipal politics which in turn affected the form and shape of the emerging municipality.

Further research revealed that political controversies arising from the problem of water supply dated back to the founding of the municipality in 1840. It was discovered that it had dominated municipal politics for over 70 years, as is indicated by the title of this dissertation, "The politics of water supply". The objective of this dissertation is therefore to examine the relationship between water and municipal government and is not a history simply concerned with the development of water alone.

Although the history of Cape Town's water supply represents a relatively well defined topic, it nevertheless presented several problems. Firstly almost no work has been completed on the history of water supply in other South African cities, resulting in a reliance on overseas literature for the purpose of comparative analysis. Secondly the issue of water supply is closely related to problems such as drainage and sewerage which were also sources of political conflict. The limited scope of an MA thesis has not made it possible to give these issues the full attention they deserve.

A third problem encountered arises from the fact that the dissertation covers a period of 80 years. For this reason the city's social, political and economic transformation during this period forms an important theme. While conflicts involving water are examined in detail, these have been placed within a general interpretation of the evolution of the municipality.

A further problem arising out of the timespan covered relates to changes in the meaning of the terminology of class, ethnicity and economy. For this reason a note on terminology has been included at the beginning of the dissertation.

This dissertation represents a contribution towards an urban history of Cape Town. An attempt has been made to integrate this study with recent works relating to sanitation, race and municipal politics in nineteenth-century Cape Town.

Although it had been intended to make this dissertation a comparative study in relation to other South African towns, the lack of research in this field has made this difficult. Where appropriate, comparisons have been made with Victorian cities in Britain and its colonies as well as with the United States. As a result a model of the role of water supply in municipal government has been presented in the concluding chapter.

## A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

Terms of race and class usually need explanation in complex societies like Cape Town. Because this dissertation spans nearly a century, it is obvious that definitions change their meaning as society evolves. This brief note on terminology attempts to draw attention to terms of unclear and changed meaning.

Class definitions used include underclass, dominant class, working class, business class, merchant class and rentier class. The term underclass has been used in the nineteenth century as Cape Town had no true working class due to the lack of industry. Similarly the term 'merchant class' has been used to describe those involved in commercial activities in the nineteenth century, while the term business class is more appropriate for the twentieth century.

Racial and ethnic terminology used like coloured, malay and Dutch are also problematic. The term malay has been avoided unless used by contemporary commentators because it cannot be precisely defined in this period. Elsewhere the term 'coloured' is used. The description of Dutch and English speakers have been confined to the white inhabitants during the nineteenth century.

(x)

Other terms needing definition include those referring to place. In the nineteenth century the meaning of the place Cape Town is restricted to the city's old boundaries until municipal unification in 1913. The word Town House refers to the seat of city government before it was transferred to the City Hall in the twentieth century.

ABBREVIATIONS

CWSC	Citizen's Water Supply Committee
CSWC	Citizen's Steenbras Water Committee
JWC	Joint Water Committee
LC	Legislative Council
MLA	Member of the Legislative Assembly
MLC	Member of the Legislative Council
MPC	Member of the Provincial Council
MUC	Municipal Union Conference
SMWB	Suburban Municipal Water Board
SJWDC	Suburban Joint Water and Drainage Committee
TBHB	Table Bay Harbour Board

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## INTRODUCTION

### THE POLITICS OF WATER SUPPLY

"In previous centuries water supply was one of several environmental factors which set limits to urban growth. Now by sophisticated technology and enlarged wealth, this confinement was broken; but for the larger cities the massive costs of extending supplies brought political turmoil..."

PJ Waller (1)

Water supply represented a problem for Cape Town from the very beginning. While the settlement had been established for the provision of food and water for the ships of the Dutch East India Company [DEIC], the site at Table Bay was chosen because it was a safe anchorage, rather than for its quality as a replenishment station.<sup>(2)</sup> Although fresh water was available, it was limited, making the construction of a reservoir a priority once fortifications had been completed.<sup>(3)</sup> The DEIC had never intended to establish a large or permanent settlement, thus at the time it was of little consequence that the site had insufficient water to sustain a large town or city.

While water shortages remained a problem throughout the DEIC period, it was not until the mid-nineteenth century that it began to have an impact on the town's economic, social and political

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- (1) P.J. Waller, Town, City, and Nation, England 1850-1914, Oxford, 1983, p.302.
  - (2) The DEIC choice was dictated by the need for a station approximately halfway between Europe and the East Indies. As much of the African East and West coast south of the equator was controlled by the Portuguese, the Cape was the only real choice.
  - (3) H.W.J. Picard, Masters of the Castle, Cape Town, 1972, pp.46-48. This was built under the authority of Commander Wagenaar to supply the Company's ships. Part of this reservoir, which originally measured 55 x 15m survives within the Golden acre complex.

development. The rapid growth in population that took place from the 1870's meant that new sources of supply had to be found by the municipality to sustain the emerging city. The enormous cost of extending these supplies brought political turmoil to Cape Town's local government. This conflict, which has been termed the politics of water supply, was to dominate municipal politics for three quarters of a century. While economics lay at the heart of the politics of water supply, the water problem was in turn linked to a variety of issues. Water shortages were directly related to questions of health, sanitation and disease which were important social and political issues in their own right. Typically water shortages were accompanied by an upsurge in disease or the outbreak of an epidemic, consequently bringing the issue of water supply and sanitation to a head. Indeed since the establishment of the municipality in 1840, water and sanitation became linked to a struggle for civic improvement and for the creation of a more responsible and efficient city government capable of addressing these issues.

The politics of water supply thus represented a juncture for the interrelated issues of civic and sanitation reform. Furthermore the recurring nature of water shortages gave rise to a clear pattern, where each time the city's sanitation threshold was reached, renewed political crises erupted, which almost always resulted in decisive changes in the municipality's economic and political direction.

The water problem was not confined to Cape Town. The establishment of the suburban municipalities in the Cape Peninsula during the late nineteenth century was followed by a struggle between the city and the suburbs for control over the water resources of the hinterland. This added a further dimension to the politics of water supply, as local rivalry clouded the issues and delayed a solution to the problem.

Ultimately the growing severity of water shortages experienced by the suburbs forced them to agree to the formation of a single unified municipality of Greater Cape Town in 1913, as a means of securing the future growth of the Cape Peninsula.

The significance of the issue of water supply extends far beyond the political and economic conflicts outlined above. This thesis argues that Cape Town's problem of water supply is unique in terms of the extent of the impact it had on its history. While the quotation from Waller at the opening of this chapter implies that the problem of water supply is an issue that faces every city at some point in its history, in the case of Cape Town the problem was both prolonged and intense. In the remainder of this chapter we will examine the reasons for this.

The persistence of the issue of water supply may be attributed to three factors. The first concerns Cape Town's geographic and environmental situation which determined the specific nature of its water problem. The second, as it has already been suggested, concerns the cost of augmenting supplies, which was beyond the financial resources of the municipality. Lastly, a solution to the problem of water supply was delayed as a result of it becoming subject to class and racial conflicts which had arisen within Cape Town at this time. The water and sanitation crisis had different social and economic consequences for the city's heterogeneous population, giving rise to conflicting perceptions of the cause of the problem and its solution.

In addition to examining the factors which underlay the dominance of the issue of water supply in Cape Town's municipal affairs, this chapter will also attempt to place it within a broader perspective and to determine its role within the city's history. Comparisons will be made with other South African towns, as well as with the experience of British and colonial cities in their

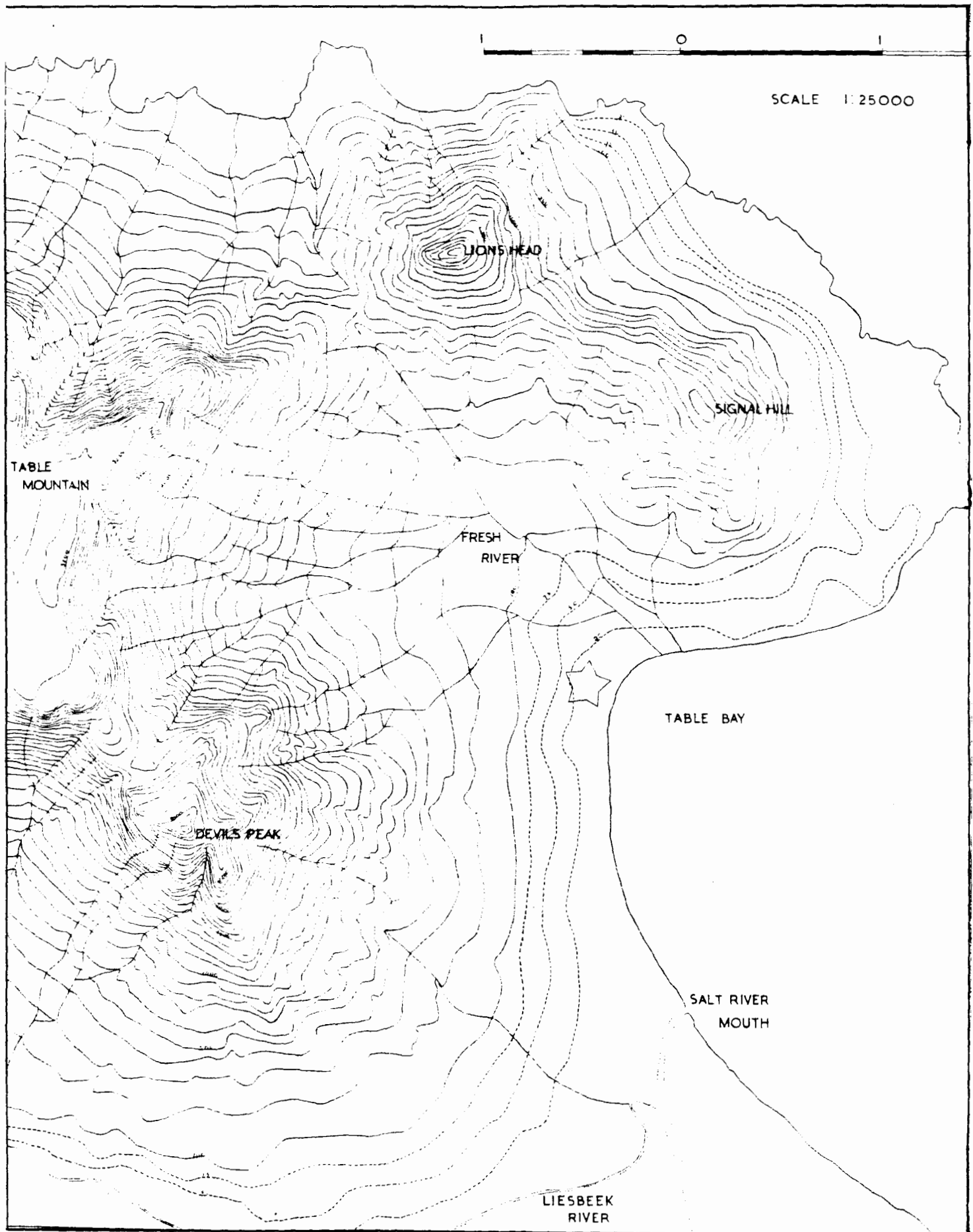
development<sup>7</sup> of water supply. Furthermore the problem of sanitation and water supply will be located within the context of the Victorian city, and related to issues such as urbanisation, industrialisation and municipal reform of which it is very much a part.

#### THE GEOGRAPHIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXT AND ITS RELATION TO THE ECONOMICS OF WATER SUPPLY

Waller's concept of water as an environmental factor 'setting limits to urban growth' points to the heart of Cape Town's water problem. The fact that Cape Town is one of the few cities in the world that is not situated on or near a major source of fresh water is in itself indicative of the scale of the problem. Even the streams found in the immediate vicinity of Cape Town are non-perennial, a consequence not only of the large seasonal variation in rainfall typical of the region's mediterranean climate, but also because of their small catchment areas which are located a very short distance from the sea. (see map one at the beginning of the chapter showing the Cape Peninsula's river system and map two overleaf for the Table Valley drainage basin) The Cape Peninsula's hydrographic features strongly resemble that of a small island. The spine of mountain range running the length of the peninsula, culminating in the Table Mountain massif, represented a mixed blessing in terms of water supply. While most of the Peninsula's rainfall flowed off directly into the sea, Table Mountain itself had the effect of a sponge, so that water was captured and slowly released throughout the year through numerous springs at the base of the mountain which lay just above the city. While these springs were the main source of water for the first 150 years of Cape Town's existence, the supply was barely sufficient for the dry summer months, and it was only a matter of time before this source was outgrown. Once these springs had been exhausted, the next most accessible source of supply was located at the top of Table Mountain itself, or more accurately the sloping plateau or 'back table' which lies

MAP 2  
TABLE VALLEY DRAINAGE SYSTEM

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SOURCE: M.MARSHALL, "The Growth and Development of

directly behind it. This source was of a greater although limited quantity. By the end of the nineteenth century the city had outgrown this too, and was forced to direct its attention towards the Peninsula's hinterland to augment its water supplies further.

The nearest source of water outside of the Cape Peninsula lay within the Hottentots Holland and Wemmershoek Mountains, some 50 kilometers away from the city. The distance itself, even at the time, was not an overwhelming obstacle, as many of the world's cities drew water supplies from afar.<sup>(4)</sup> Although the hinterland possessed a far greater quantity of water than available within the Peninsula even these sources were hardly more than large streams. The problem therefore involved one of considerable expenditure in return for a relatively small amount of water, as large dams had to be built to maximise the capture of water from these watersheds, which would then have to be transported by pipeline over long distances. Other South African cities such as Johannesburg and Kimberley had similar problems but, unlike Cape Town, their source of supply was the powerful Vaal River which required relatively modest expenditure for its catchment in return for an almost unlimited supply of water.

Distance is not the most important criterion amongst environmental factors which determine a city's water supply. In his study of the water supply of major cities in the USA, Louis Cain identifies four types of water resources upon which cities are located, each of which having a distinct impact on the evolution of their water and sanitation systems, with different

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(4) P.J. Waller, Town, City, and Nation, p.302. Examples of distances between water schemes and contemporary British cities include: Birmingham (70 miles); Manchester (80 miles); Leicester (60 miles); Nottingham (40 miles); Liverpool (50 miles) and Derby (35 miles).

economic consequences.<sup>(5)</sup> Cain argues that cities situated on major rivers or lakes tend to experience problems over the quality of drinking water caused by the discharge of effluent,<sup>(6)</sup> while cities situated near minor rivers or at the sea tend to be more concerned with water shortages.<sup>(7)</sup> While Cain's attempt at creating an environment related economic model is overdrawn and simplistic, it does underline the correlation between a city's geographic location and its economic consequences.

The main expense borne by major river and lake cities is directed towards improving their sanitation systems. This usually requires a single large capital investment, minimizing the likelihood of protracted political conflict over its cost. The experience of coastal cities such as Cape Town, Boston in the state of Massachusetts,<sup>(8)</sup> and Sydney in Australia<sup>(9)</sup>, was the opposite, as expenditure was directed towards the augmentation of their water supply and less on drainage and sewerage.<sup>(10)</sup> In common with cities dependant on minor rivers, coastal cities have to develop multiple sources for their water supply,<sup>(11)</sup> at greater cost and over a long period of time, thus increasing the potential for political conflict.

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- (5) L.P. Cain, "An Economic History of Urban Location and Sanitation", Research in Economic History, Volume 2, 1977, University of Illinois, p.338.
  - (6) Pollution of the water supply of lake cities is inevitable, as they are located within natural drainage basins. Cities located on large rivers suffer from upstream pollution.
  - (7) L.P. Cain, "An Economic History of Urban Location", p.338. Coastal cities situated on large rivers generally cannot use this for water supply due to salinity from tidal action.
  - (8) *ibid.*, p.344-349.
  - (9) D. Clark, "'Worse than Physic': Sydney's Water Supply 1788-1888", M. Kelly (editor), Nineteenth-Century Sydney, Essays in Urban History, Sydney University Press, 1978, pp. 54-65.
  - (10) Coastal cities had the advantage of being able to discharge untreated sewerage straight into the sea, obviating the need for costly purification or containment.
  - (11) L.P. Cain, "An Economic History of Urban Location", p.372.

The cost of augmenting water supply went far beyond the expense of building reservoirs and dams. Ideally, water should not be provided without the existence of an efficient sanitation system, as an uncontrolled supply contributed to the spread of water-borne diseases and epidemics. The introduction of a regular water supply therefore required pipes for distribution to households, sewers to carry water borne sewerage, and a drainage system to dispose of waste water. The massive cost of extending supplies exhausted municipal resources which often meant long delays before the construction of a sanitation system. Furthermore, the improvement in water supply was usually followed by an increase in its utilization as well as wastage. Without adequate drains and sewers, the benefit of a regular supply often brought a high social cost in terms of the rise in incidence of water-borne diseases which were translated into high mortality rates.<sup>(12)</sup>

The question of the cost of providing water to Cape Town is a fundamental one, and as Waller suggests, it is the primary source of all political conflict over water supply. The impact of this cost was compounded by the fact that the responsibility for providing water rested entirely with Cape Town's municipality, which was not always the norm with cities of this period. While it is true that many other city governments were also responsible for providing water, the costs were rarely as great, and were often borne by a variety of institutions, such as central

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(12) D. Dunstan, Governing the Metropolis. Politics, Technology and Social Change in a Victorian City: Melbourne 1850-1891, Melbourne, 1984, p.235. Also see E.B. van Heyningen, "Public Health and Society in Cape Town 1880-1910", Ph.D. thesis, (University of Cape Town), 1989, p.21. Van Heyningen suggests that "Cape Town must be regarded as aberrant in terms of world mortality change because the evidence... suggests that a clean and adequate water supply, water-borne sewerage and the development of a sophisticated medical infrastructure had little impact on the survival of Cape Town's labouring population." This might be explained by the fact that a sanitation system was only developed in working class areas of the suburbs after municipal unification in 1913.



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government, water boards and private water companies. For example in the case of Johannesburg, water was provided by the Rand Water Board, which supplied water to a number of towns as well as gold mines, with the resulting economy of scale effectively reducing the cost of water.<sup>(13)</sup> At Kimberley, water was supplied by a private water company until the 1920's,<sup>(14)</sup> and although water was expensive for consumers, this absolved the municipality from committing itself to long term capital expenditure. The suburban municipalities of the Cape Peninsula were similarly supplied by a water company from 1889 until it was taken over by a water board in 1900. The municipalities of Port Elizabeth, Durban and East London which, like Cape Town, were also responsible for providing water, spent considerably less on water schemes as these towns were all situated near to large rivers.<sup>(15)</sup> Moreover, in post-Union South Africa the state began to assume a more direct role in local government, consequently the cost of developing water schemes, especially for the smaller rural towns, was increasingly borne by the provincial government.<sup>(16)</sup>

Amongst overseas cities, most municipalities did not directly bear the full responsibility of providing water. Indeed almost all British towns as well as colonial settlements such as

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- (13) J. Shorten, The Johannesburg Saga, Johannesburg, 1970, p.571.
  - (14) B. Roberts, Civic Century. The first one hundred years of the Kimberley municipality, Kimberley, 1978, p.25.
  - (15) W.P.M. Henderson, Durban, Fifty Years of Municipal History, Durban, 1904, pp.225-248; R. Lynsky, They Built a City, Durban, 1982; The Centenary Executive Committee, East London Century: 1848-1948, East London, 1948, pp. 69-75; Port Elizabeth Publicity Association, Souvenir Brochure 1860-1960: Port Elizabeth Municipal Century, Port Elizabeth, 1960, pp.45-53. Detailed literature on these municipalities is generally lacking. See Appendix A for comparisons between the water schemes of major South African cities.
  - (16) A.de V. Minnaar, "Graaf-Reinet's Water Problems", in Contree, Number 22, pp.26-28.

Toronto<sup>(17)</sup> and Sydney,<sup>(18)</sup> and many American cities, including Boston, New Orleans and Chicago,<sup>(19)</sup> relied on water companies to develop their supplies. Water companies were unable to provide water to cities on a large scale and were reluctant to lay on water to working class households due to the high capital outlay and low financial return.<sup>(20)</sup> Water companies were also not prepared to provide drains and sewers because they offered no profit. As general rule private enterprise proved unwilling to provide capital investment unless short term profits were assured and the period of investment was short. A clear pattern may be determined amongst towns served by water companies. Once a 'sanitary threshold'<sup>(21)</sup> was reached where private companies could no longer meet demand, or could not profitably provide water for all classes of society, controversy broke out between the merits of public and private ownership.<sup>(22)</sup> Consequently, municipal government or water boards were forced to take over the function of providing water. Even then lack of finance often prevented the development of schemes, sometimes for many years. Often it took a natural disaster such as a major fire, drought or the outbreak of an epidemic to stimulate either the local government or the state to take action.

Cape Town differed markedly from the typical pattern where control over water supply passed from private to public ownership. Indeed water supply had been in the

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- (17) E. Jones and D. McCalla, "Toronto Waterworks, 1840-77: Continuity and change in Nineteenth-Century Toronto Politics", Canadian Historical Review, Volume 1X, Number 3, 1979, pp.300-323.
  - (18) S. Fitzgerald, Rising Damp: Sydney 1870-90, Melbourne, 1987, pp.81-83.
  - (19) L.P. Cain, "An Economic History of Urban Location", pp.337-377
  - (20) N.M. Blake, Water for the Cities, Syracuse University press, 1956, p.77.
  - (21) D. Clark, "Worse than Physic"; p.55.
  - (22) L.P. Cain, "An Economic History of Urban Location", p.372.

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hands of the municipality since its inception in 1840. The most likely reason for the absence of private enterprise was because the springs that supplied the city were scattered, and even if a water company had succeeded in gaining control over them, little profit could have been made from this meagre supply. If anything, Cape Town's experience was diametrically opposed to that of most Victorian cities in that suggestions were constantly made for the removal of the waterworks from the authority of the inefficient municipality to a government board.<sup>(23)</sup> For as long as Cape Town was able to resist these pressures, the development of its water supply was the subject of political conflict within the municipality.

Clearly environmental factors such as climate and Cape Town's geographic location had a major impact on the cost of providing water and the form which the supply took. While it has been argued that the financing of water schemes was a major source of political conflict within municipal government, this is only one dimension of the politics of water supply. The issue of water supply was closely related to a fundamental process of social, economic and political transformation taking place within Cape Town during this period.

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(23) Suggestions were often made by Cape Town's press for the establishment of a water company. However this took place before the collapse of water companies in Britain, nor did they seriously entertain the financial viability of such a venture. The water company established in the Southern Peninsula in 1889 was successful for a time as it controlled the Albion springs, a comparatively large source of water supply which did not require significant capital investment on its development.

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WATER SUPPLY IN THE CONTEXT OF THE SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL  
TRANSFORMATION OF CAPE TOWN FROM THE 1850'S TO THE 1920'S

Up until the 1870's Cape Town's economic structure centered on its function as a port. The city had very little in the way of industry, and in some respects typified a British provincial town, administering its rural hinterland. Its function as a conduit for the colony's agricultural products and imported manufactured goods underpinned the dominance of traders and the merchant elite in its economy and social structure during the first half of the century.<sup>(24)</sup>

The 1870's represent one of the most important turning points in Cape Town's history. The discovery of diamonds at Kimberley in 1867 dramatically accelerated the growth of the town and at the same time hastened the process of a social, political and economic transformation that had been under way since the Second British Occupation of the Cape in 1806.

The most tangible changes that took place during this period were those relating to Cape Town's physical growth, both in terms of the expansion of its built environment and increase in the size of its population. Between 1875 and 1911 Cape Town's population increased from 33 000 to 139 000, effectively quadrupling within a period of 36 years.<sup>(25)</sup> This took place within the context of high mortality rates due to the regular outbreak of epidemics, and with a constant migration of people to the gold and diamond fields of the interior. This growth was largely the result of

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(24) D. Warren, "Merchants, Commissioners and Wardmasters: Municipal Politics in Cape Town, 1840-54", MA dissertation, University of Cape Town, 1986, pp.69-76.

(25) G.42-1876, Results of a census of the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope...1875; and UG.32-1911, Census Returns.

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the twin processes of immigration and urbanisation,<sup>(26)</sup> which effectively altered the language and racial mix within the city, increasing tensions between the dominant political and economic interests. The influx of immigrants and anglicisation of the Afrikaner elite underlay the gradual shift towards English control over the city's political institutions and the transformation of its economic base.

The process of political change was already well under way by the mid-nineteenth century. Initially political power within municipal government had been in the hands of the merchant elite, large land-owning families and senior colonial officials, but by the mid-1840's it had shifted towards a heterogeneous group of rising local merchants, shopkeepers and landlords, mostly of Dutch origin.<sup>(27)</sup> This group was supported by householders and tenants, who benefited from the rentier class's dominance of the Town House<sup>(28)</sup> by their keeping municipal rates to a minimum. Their authority was however challenged during the 1850's and 1860's by a group of mainly English-speaking merchants, businessmen and professional classes who questioned the priorities of municipal government which stood accused of serving the interests of the landlord or rentier class, who neglected the town's need for an improved sanitation system and water supply. The challenge against the rentier class's dominance of the town council was resisted until the early 1880's, by which time the problem of water supply and sanitation had approached a crisis, which posed a serious threat to the future of the town.

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(26) C. Simkins and E.B. Van Heyningen, "Fertility, mortality and migration in the Cape Colony 1891-1904", in The International Journal of African Studies, Volume 22, Number 1, 1989, pp.79-111.

(27) D. Warren, "Merchants, Commissioners and Wardmasters", pp.225-232.

(28) The Town House was the seat of municipal government until the City Hall was completed in 1905.

The 1880's represent an important turning point in Cape Town's municipal history, and mark the beginning of the development of an effective water supply and sanitation system. During this period water and sanitation were at the centre of a political conflict that divided the dominant classes over how the city should respond to the changes brought about by the Mineral Revolution, which threatened the functioning of the existing order. The economic boom of the 1870's and 1880's overloaded the city's infrastructure and brought with it a host of social problems which in turn reflected the inadequacies within municipal government.

The disintegration of pre-industrial socioeconomic relationships within the underclass was also to place strains on the fabric of the city. Of major concern to Cape Town's elite was the large underclass<sup>(29)</sup> which had rapidly swelled the city's population since emancipation in 1838. Because of the lack of industry, the underclass tended to be engaged in seasonal labour and casual employment, although a significant number became artisans and traders.<sup>(30)</sup> The transitory nature of labour and the shifting population added to the problem of disease, overcrowding, sanitation and water supply. Cape Town's merchant and business classes came to see the continuation of the city's prosperity being dependant on issues such as the political containment of the city's underclass, the political reform of the municipality and the improvement of sanitation and water supply.

It was this desire for fundamental social and political reform which brought reformist merchants, businessmen and the

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- (29) The term 'underclass' is used by Bickford-Smith to describe Cape Town's labouring population in the 19th century, as there was no true industrial working class of any significance.
  - (30) V. Bickford-Smith, "Cape Town on the Eve of the Mineral Revolution (c.1875)", paper presented to the Fifth Workshop on the History of Cape Town, University of Cape Town, 1985, p.14.

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professional classes into conflict with the rentier classes controlling the town council. The owners of large properties, landlords and householders had long resisted expensive water and sanitation schemes financed through property rates as these were perceived to be to the benefit of the city's merchants and businessmen. The key issue was one of the cost of municipal improvements, and as Bickford-Smith argues in his study of this period, the issue of water supply and sanitation were central in the battle for the political control of Cape Town.<sup>(31)</sup>

Race and class are important elements of the politics of water supply. While the politics of water supply is closely linked to the struggle between the dominant classes for control over the municipality, it was also during this period that there emerged a perception amongst the working classes of water supply as the prerogative of Cape Town's merchant and business interests. This had arisen out of attempts to isolate the underclass politically because of its support for the rentier class, which formed an obstacle to municipal reform. This perception explains much of the dynamics of the politics of water supply in the early twentieth century. Indeed although reformers gained control of municipality in the 1880's, for the next 40 years they were confronted with working class as well as middle class opposition to new water schemes.

From the turn of the century, attention was directed towards the question of the municipal unification of the Cape Peninsula. In the same way water supply had been bound to the issues of sanitation and municipal reform during the nineteenth century, water was central to the process of unification. The main cause of the advancement of unification was the Cape Peninsula's

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(31) V. Bickford-Smith, "Commerce, class and ethnicity in Cape Town, 1875-1902", Ph.D. thesis, University of Cambridge, 1988, p.15.

need for a common sanitation and water strategy to sustain urban growth. This was strongly resisted by householders and smaller businessmen within Cape Town, who saw unification as a strategy to provide the suburbs with water at the ratepayer's expense. Similarly attempts at developing a joint city and suburban water scheme in the hinterland were met with strong resistance and resulted in the ascendance of an anti-water and anti-unification group within the city council.

Ultimately as the Cape Peninsula's demand for water grew, opposition to municipal unification subsided. The creation of a single municipality for Greater Cape Town in 1913 did not bring an end to the city's water problem, a solution to which was delayed a further five years due to divisions within the council and continued ratepayer resistance to the development of a hinterland scheme.

#### WATER SUPPLY IN THE CONTEXT OF MUNICIPAL REFORM IN THE VICTORIAN CITY

In common with nearly all Victorian cities, Cape Town's municipal government was confronted by a phase of rapid urban growth which demanded fundamental reform in order to survive. The issue of municipal reform had emerged in Britain by the mid-nineteenth century, setting a precedent for colonial towns and cities.

In Britain during the 1850's and 1860's a struggle broke out between municipalities and parliament as the former attempted to raise finance and acquire statutory powers to tackle urban problems brought about by the Industrial Revolution.<sup>(32)</sup> The reformed municipalities that arose out of early struggles became

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(32) J.R. Kellet, "Municipal Socialism, Enterprise and Trading in the Victorian City", Urban History Yearbook, 1978, p.36; p.40.



the stronghold of the middle classes. In the 1870's and 1880's concepts of 'municipalisation', 'civic pride' and 'municipal socialism' developed as local governments redefined their role within society.<sup>(33)</sup>

Cape Town was not unaffected by this movement which had seen the gradual extension of municipal authority from the provision of basic services such as the improvement of water supply and sanitation, to the operation of electricity, street lighting, markets, abattoirs and tramways, eventually touching on almost every aspect of city life up to the building of public baths, parks, libraries and art galleries.<sup>(34)</sup> Furthermore, there was also a tendency towards the creation of a more professional and powerful city government employing the skills of engineers, medical officers, accountants and administrators. Indeed the response and adaptation to the process of urbanisation and industrialisation were increasingly taken at the level of the municipal rather than the parliamentary level, where councillors exercised direct control over policy. Cape Town however had no Joseph Chamberlain, nor did the Cape parliament provide any social legislation to stimulate this process.

At Cape Town the thrust for municipal reform finally came from outside the town council, when the rentier class's control over the municipality was finally broken in the 1880's. While civic leaders consciously emulated forms of municipal government which had developed in Britain, the acceptance of municipal reform was not wholehearted or without opposition. By the end of the nineteenth century many municipalities had overreached themselves in the race for municipalisation and improvement. In Cape Town,

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(33) J.R. Kellet, "Municipal Socialism", pp.36-40; A.S.A. Briggs, Victorian Cities, Harmondsworth, 1982, pp.184-240.

(34) F. Dolman, Municipalities at Work, London, 1895, pp.

as in Britain, there emerged a new class of civic leaders, often of lesser social standing and economic substance, who urged caution in an era of excessive municipal expenditure and heavy municipal indebtedness. It has been argued by E.P. Hennock<sup>(35)</sup> that this was not a conflict of class interest, but rather a clash over which type of business attitude should be dominant in local government; that of economic caution or enterprise, which demanded a choice between 'improvement or economy'. A similar reaction occurred in Cape Town where smaller businessmen and the middle classes often rebelled at the cost of municipal improvement, particularly when the construction of new dams and reservoirs were undertaken during periods of economic depression. But while divisions within the town council over the cost of water schemes was not necessarily along class lines, the opposing factions drew on the support of different classes, and appealed to racial prejudices, to bolster opposing economic and political positions.

The emergence of water supply as a political issue was a phenomenon that was not confined to Cape Town. One of the best documented examples of water supply developing into a political issue took place in nineteenth-century Liverpool. Fraser has argued that attempts to develop the 'Rivington Pike Scheme' was "for many years the most important issue in Liverpool's affairs".<sup>(36)</sup> The development of this scheme at a cost of £450 000, inappropriately coincided with a period of economic depression causing it to develop into a major political issue. Fraser argues that 'Anti Pikests' were motivated by the need for 'economy' and were indifferent to Liverpool's sanitary needs.<sup>(37)</sup> Leading Pikests were "wealthy merchants" and "professional men"

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(35) E.P. Hennock, Fit and Proper Persons. Ideal and Reality in Nineteenth-Century Urban Government, London, 1973, p.317.

(36) D. Fraser, Power and Authority in the Victorian City, Oxford, 1979, p.33.

(37) *ibid.*, p.35.

while 'Anti Pikests' were "shopkeepers and tradesmen" who were opposed to increased rates.<sup>(38)</sup> This conflict argues Fraser, "weakened the social and political standing of the Corporation and [changed] the social composition of the Council".<sup>(39)</sup>

The example provided by Liverpool's Rivington Pike scheme coincides closely the reaction against Cape Town's hinterland scheme in the early twentieth century. Working class perceptions of these water schemes benefiting the rich, and middle class opposition to excessive municipal spending resulted in small businessmen and householders reasserting their control over the city council. While in Liverpool the politics of water supply was limited to a single incident, in Cape Town water was a recurring issue, taking different forms over time. Many of the conflicts that arose may be compared to the experience of various cities such as Bolton, Bradford and Leeds,<sup>(40)</sup> but nowhere was the politics of water supply more intense, as persistent, or so closely bound up with issues of race and class.

Comparisons made between the manner in which different cities managed their water supply problems are useful in that they provide a perspective against which Cape Town's responses may be measured. Comparisons are limited by the fact that every city is differentiated by its government structure, its social and economic order and by its geographic location. For example, the municipal government of Melbourne, which is situated in a

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(38) D.Fraser, Power and Authority, p.35.

(39) ibid.

(40) B.Barber, "Aspects of Municipal government, 1835-1914" in D.Fraser(ed), A History of Modern Leeds, (Manchester), 1890, pp.316-319.; A. Elliot, "Municipal government in Bradford in the mid-nineteenth century", in D. Fraser(ed), Municipal Reform and the Industrial City, (Leicester), 1982, pp.119-122.; J. Garrard, Leadership and power in Victorian industrial towns, (London), 1983, pp.91-93, 189-191.

similar colonial political and economic context, differs substantially from Cape Town in that its water supply was controlled by the colonial government through a board of works, effectively diminishing its political impact on its municipal development.<sup>(41)</sup> Examples of other towns and cities reveal unlimited combinations of interaction between water supply and municipal politics. Thus in the city of Bolton, the issue of augmenting water supply was not so much shaped by opposing interests within the city, as by conflicting claims for control of the hinterland by surrounding towns and rural industries.<sup>(42)</sup> A different example is that of Bradford, where a struggle took place between the municipality and a private water company for control over water supply.<sup>(43)</sup> While the experience of each town and city is unique, there are aspects of the politics of water supply that are common to nearly all. While this dissertation will stress what is unique to Cape Town, it will also attempt to draw comparisons to determine an underlying pattern of the politics of water supply within urban history.

Despite this search for commonality, it will be stressed that the issue of water supply had a specific importance in Cape Town's municipal history. Indeed, the functioning and perception of water supply as a 'class interest' represents the basis for the extent of its impact on the city's social, economic, political and spatial development.

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(41) D. Dunstan, Governing the Metropolis, pp.233-288.

(42) J. Garrard, Leadership and Power, pp.91-92.

(43) A. Elliot, "Municipal government in Bradford", pp.119-122.

## THE HISTORY OF CAPE TOWN'S WATER SUPPLY 1840-1920

The history of the development of Cape Town's water supply can be divided into three distinct phases in the period covered by this dissertation, each forming the subject of a separate chapter.

These three periods represent stages of the outward expansion of the city's water supply from springs in Table Valley to the water supply schemes of the hinterland. The first period begins with the establishment of the municipality in 1840 and finishes with the turn of the century, the second lasts from 1900 to approximately 1910 prior to municipal unification, with the final period ending in the early 1920's with the resolution of the problem of water supply. Each of these periods approximates with fairly well-defined phases within Cape Town's municipal history. Indeed the development of the city's water supply corresponds with changes in the form of municipal government, as well as with the ascendance of different 'classes' who controlled the town council.

In the first chapter of this dissertation which documents the building of the Table Valley reservoirs and the Table Mountain dams, it is argued that Cape Town's problem of water supply and sanitation became the focus of an attempt to reform the city's municipality between the 1850's and 1880's. The ascendance of reform minded men within the town council during the 1880's was followed by a golden era of civic achievement with the construction of two major dams and an integrated sanitation system. By the turn of the century, the municipality had financially overextended itself on these projects, and as a result the reformists suffered a political setback when they were ousted from the town council by economically conservative small businessmen and householders.

In Chapter Two it is argued that by the turn of the century the issue of sanitation had largely been resolved, and concern over water supply was related to limits which shortages might place on urban growth as well as the development of industry. Once again the question of augmenting supplies became the source of political conflict within the city council as a result of attempts to develop a water scheme in the hinterland jointly with the suburban municipalities. This was perceived by many middle and working class householders not to be in the city's interest but to the benefit of businessmen and the wealthy classes residing in the Peninsula's suburban municipalities. Opposition to the hinterland water supply scheme which was to serve the entire Cape Peninsula was to lead to serious water shortages in the suburbs. It is argued that this was to force the suburban municipalities to forgo their independence and seek unification with Cape Town by 1913.

Chapter Three which covers the period from 1910 to the 1920's, concerns the events that led to the construction of the Steenbras Dam. The focus of this chapter falls on a referendum that took place in 1917, in which ratepayers were faced with a choice between two hinterland schemes. The referendum was to develop into a major political conflict in which class and racial divisions that had developed over the issue of water supply over half a century brought their full weight to bear.

The final chapter will assess the significance of water supply in the history of Cape Town, especial with regard to the evolution of its municipal government.

## WATER SUPPLY AND URBAN HISTORY

While a materialist approach to the history of Cape Town primarily hinges on important economic changes, such as the economic impact of the Second British Occupation, the discovery of diamonds, the development of industry, or the 1930's depression; other influences, as Christopher Saunders has recently suggested,<sup>(44)</sup> are equally important in shaping the urban landscape.

One of the objectives of this dissertation is to illustrate the degree to which aspects of municipal development which are often perceived to be obscure, such as the provision of water supply, as well as the building of drains and sewers, do form an integral part of interpreting urban history. Most urban histories touch on the development of water supply, but often in an ephemeral way. Thus the building of dams and reservoirs are held up as examples of civic and engineering achievement and as monuments to the modern city state<sup>(45)</sup> while it is nearly always assumed that the development of water schemes were for the general good of the city, in terms of improved health and raised living standards, or to facilitate industrialisation. Yet questions concerning the social and political cost, or the economic impact of providing water are rarely raised or related to the overall process of urban development.<sup>(46)</sup>

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(44) C. Saunders, "Methodological issues in South African Urban History", (draft paper of a report commissioned by the H.R.S.C.), 1990, pp.36-37.

(45) Typical examples would include: J. Shorten, Cape Town, (Cape Town), 1963, pp.334-344.; E.W. Slinger, Cape Town's 100 years of progress: a century of local government, (Cape Town), 1968, pp.13-19.; H.W.S. Picard, Grand Parade: the birth of greater Cape Town 1850-1913, (Cape Town), 1969.

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To attempt to write a history of a city's water supply would be a sterile and meaningless exercise if it were isolated from the broader context of urban history. In this respect this dissertation draws on the recent work of Digby Warren,<sup>(47)</sup> Bickford-Smith<sup>(48)</sup> and Van Heyningen<sup>(49)</sup> in attempting to develop an integrated perspective to Cape Town's history. This study therefore does not simply represent a history of the city's dams, pipelines and sewers but an attempt to interpret the significance of water within the context of a city in the process of transition. Only through such an approach can the significance of water supply become apparent and contribute towards an understanding Cape Town's history.

Finally, while this dissertation attempts to draw comparisons with other towns and cities, with particular reference to Anglo-American urban history, its main objective is to determine what is unique to Cape Town. Indeed, while it is useful to identify a commonality in the experience of urban places, it is also true, as Gordon Pirie has suggested in his review of South African urban history, that it is pointless to provide a string of 'more examples of the same'.<sup>(50)</sup> While it cannot be denied that Cape Town's dominant classes consciously copied the experiences of

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- (46) K.S. Hunt, "The Development of the Municipal Government in the Eastern Province...with Special Reference to Grahamstown 1827-1862", MA.thesis(Rhodes University), in Archives Year Book for South African History, (Vol24), 1963.; A. de V. Minaar, "Graaf Reinet's Water Problems", in Contree, Number 22(1988), pp.23-30.; W.L. Speight, "Water supply beginnings in South Africa: the history of the Cape effort, in Municipal Affairs, 9(99) 1943, pp23-25.; R. Taylor, "Cape Town's Municipal Services a Century Ago", in Contree, Number 15(1984), pp.24-27; "Cape Town Water Supply: History of Cape Town", in Municipal Engineer, 10(2), 1979, pp53-57.
- (47) D.Warren; "Merchants, Commissioners and Wardmasters: Municipal Politics in Cape Town, 1840-54", MA dissertation, University of Cape Town, 1988.
- (48) V. Bickford Smith, "Commerce class and ethnicity in Cape Town, 1875-1902", Ph.D. thesis, University of Cambridge 1988.
- (49) E.B. van Heyningen, "Public Health and Society in Cape Town 1880-1910", Ph.D thesis, university of Cape Town, 1989.



British municipal government, it is as important to reveal and probe distinctive problems and responses unique to the South African condition.

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(50) G.H. Pirie, "South African urban history", Urban History Yearbook, 1985, p. 24.



## CHAPTER ONE

## WATER, SANITATION AND MUNICIPAL REFORM

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CAPE TOWN'S WATER SUPPLY  
1840 TO 1900

In most general histories of Cape Town, the subject of the city's water supply is relegated to a paragraph or two, usually describing the engineering achievements of dam building, and the enormous financial cost of such undertakings.<sup>(1)</sup> Thus in the period from 1840 to 1900, the most significant achievements would encompass the construction of the 'Number One' and 'Number Two' reservoirs in Table Valley by the early 1860's; the completion of the Molteno reservoir in the 1880's and the opening of the Woodhead and Hely Hutchinson dams on Table Mountain by the turn of the century.

In this chapter it is argued that the history of water supply goes beyond the physical development of dams and reservoirs. Indeed these structures are much like fossils, in that they are tangible pieces of the jigsaw puzzle of the city's history, but they tell us little of the men who had them built or their social, political and economic costs. While water supply represents the literal lifeblood of a city, its effect on urban life reaches beyond the sustenance of men and support of their commercial activities.

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(1) Examples include: E.W. Slinger, Cape Town's 100 years of progress, a century of Local Government, Cape Town, 1968.; P.W. Laidlaw, The growth and government of Cape Town, Cape Town, 1939.; H.W. Picard, Grand Parade: the birth of Greater Cape Town 1850-1913, Cape Town, 1977.

During the nineteenth century the need for water was closely related to attempts to develop a sanitation system as disease was a major cause for concern. Despite this, neither the issue of water supply or a drainage and sewerage system could be addressed before Cape Town's municipality was fundamentally reformed. As the town council was controlled by classes unsympathetic to large scale social improvement, water and sanitation became political issues in a struggle to oust these vested interests. As a consequence of this conflict, water supply became associated with a range of political, social and economic issues. As a political issue water supply had a major impact on the evolution of the city's government. On a social level it became embroiled in a web of class interests, racial conflict and ethnic rivalry, which essentially reflected a division between those who wanted water and those who would have to pay for it. On an economic level, the enormous financial cost of augmenting supplies, generated more conflict which was to persistently dominate municipal politics well into the twentieth century.

The development of Cape Town's water supply in the nineteenth century can be clearly broken down into three periods: (i) 1840 to 1861; (ii) 1861 to 1882; and lastly (iii) 1882 to 1897. Each of these periods coincide with a distinct phase in the development of the town's water supply. Each of these periods also coincides closely with various stages in the evolution of the city's municipal government, and reflects the gradual economic and social change taking place in latter half of the century.

In the first period, following the establishment of the municipality, the first haphazard attempts were made to secure a reliable water supply for the town. During the 1840's, political confrontations overshadowed civic improvements, delaying a solution to the problem of water supply, until the shortage itself eventually precipitated a political crisis. It was during

this period that the battle lines were formed by those who wanted water, sanitation and civic reforms.

The period between 1861 and 1882 is an intermediary one, both in terms of water supply and in the internal politics of the municipality. It is during this period that fundamental changes in Cape Town's economy and society begin to take place, setting the scene for rapid transition from a conservative, anti-reform, unprofessional municipality towards a reformist, progressive and professional municipal government, whose ascendancy is covered by final part of this chapter. We begin by briefly describing the situation found in the period prior to the establishment of the municipality in 1840.

#### CAPE TOWN'S WATER SUPPLY UNDER THE BRITISH ADMINISTRATION: 1806 TO 1840

The poorly developed state of Cape Town's water supply and sanitation system before the 1840's was a reflection of the limited power and authority of the local government. Prior to the establishment of the municipality in 1840, Cape Town had been administered by the Burgher Senate, an ineffectual and unrepresentative body that had been created by the British during the First Occupation in 1796. Although conceived as a temporary administration for the duration of the initial occupation, the Burgher Senate continued to function up until 1828, and represents Cape Town's first recognisable local government.<sup>(2)</sup> It was during this period that the first concerted efforts were made

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(2) The Burger Senate was replaced by the Burger Council during the Batavian period between 1803 and 1806, and was to take on municipal and representative functions. With the British re-occupation of the Cape, the Burger Senate was reconstituted as a purely municipal institution. See J.J. Oberholster, "Die Burger-Senate 1795-1828", MA thesis, University of Stellenbosch, 1936, pp.112-113.

to address the town's water supply problem. In 1806 the Burgher Senate referred the problem of the town's water supply to the British authorities, which resulted in the appointment of a Superintendent of Water Works.<sup>(3)</sup> Due to its limited powers to raise revenue,<sup>(4)</sup> the Burgher Senate was only able to make minimal progress. Apart from the laying of iron pipes in the main thoroughfares in 1811 and the construction of a small reservoir in Hof Street in 1816<sup>(5)</sup>, little else was accomplished by the time of the 'Senate's' abolition in 1828, when the responsibility for water supply passed into the hands of the Civil Engineer and Superintendent of Government Works.<sup>(6)</sup>

During the 1830's, the town experienced severe water shortages, which was partly a legacy of the Burgher Senate's political and economic impotence, but also a consequence of the fact that the local government was then in a state of transition, with the town being inefficiently administered by government-appointed magistrates and officials. An indication that the colonial authorities recognised the seriousness of the issue of water supply during this interim period came in 1834 when the Secretary of State allowed the establishment of a separate government office for the Cape Town Water Works, and the appointment of an advisory Water Committee under the authority of John Chisholm, as the Superintendent of Water Works.<sup>(7)</sup> This Committee was unable

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- (3) 3/CT 1/4/4/4/8/1, Minutes of the sub committee in re: Augmentation of Water Supplies, 1914-1915, Appendix A, Historical Sketch, p.2.
  - (4) J.S. Visagie, Synopsis of records of the Secretary of the Burger Senate, Cape Archives, Inventory no. 1/84, p.4. Its sources of revenue included an inhabitant tax; a house tax; a tax on market produce, grain store and road toll.
  - (5) 3/CT 1/4/4/4/8/1, Appendix A, p.2.
  - (6) CWC: Secretary Water Committee 1834-1840, Cape Archives inventory. Historical background to the period prior to the incorporation of the municipality of Cape Town in 1840, pp.1-2.
  - (7) *ibid.*

to improve on the administration of the Burgher Senate. The problem in part stemmed from the fact that the authorities exercised little control over the use of water and had no overall plan to augment and manage water supply. For example, water was distributed unregulated through 36 public fountains, and the absence of hand pumps meant that water could be drawn with a minimal amount of labour, causing much waste.<sup>(8)</sup> This lack of control over water supply, combined with the absence of a proper drainage and sewerage system, was a major cause of Cape Town's unsanitary state. This was reflected in the town's high mortality rate and the recurrence of disease and epidemics.<sup>(9)</sup> By the mid-1830's the authorities accepted that the time had arrived for the establishment of an independent local authority, to administer the town and take over the responsibility of its improvement. This resulted in the establishment of the municipal Board of Commissioners and Wardmasters in 1840. This body was however ill-equipped to govern the town, which was to see relatively little progress during the period of its administration over the next twenty years.

#### THE MUNICIPAL BOARD AND WATER SUPPLY: 1840-1861

In terms of its power and authority, the Board of Commissioners and Wardmasters <sup>(10)</sup> differed substantially from the Burgher Senate, although it was far from effective in its functioning. Its most fundamental difference was that it was directly

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(8) 3/CT 1/4/4/4/4/8/1, Appendix A, p.3.

(9) S. Judges, "Poverty, Living Conditions and Social Relations: Aspects of Life in Cape Town in the 1830's", Unpublished MA thesis, University of Cape Town, 1977, pp.58-59.

(10) The Board of Commissioners represented the executive while the Wardmasters had a subordinate supervisory function.

elected,<sup>(11)</sup> and, with provision being made for two separate boards, this theoretically provided checks and balances on its power. In reality, the narrow property qualifications required of its representatives ensured that it served the interests of a few, while the system of two boards engendered friction, competition and petty jealousy within the Town House, impairing the effectiveness of the administration of the town. Furthermore, the absence of a representative government in the colony determined that the Municipal boards became a platform for political aspirations and grievances,<sup>(12)</sup> to the detriment of the efficient administration of the town.

The 1839 [municipal] ordinance also allocated a wider range of responsibilities to the Board, including the functions of maintaining the town's fountains and reservoirs and stipulating that it provide an adequate supply of water.<sup>(13)</sup> Most important, unlike the Burgher Senate, the Board of Commissioners and Wardmasters was given limited power to tax immovable property, allowing it a degree of financial independence and the ability to undertake much needed improvements to the town. While this enabled some development to take place, in effect, the Board's financial powers were not sufficient to enable it to undertake substantial improvements.

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- (11) D. Warren, "Merchants, Commissioners and Wardmasters: Municipal politics in Cape Town, 1840-1854", Unpublished MA. thesis, University of Cape Town, 1986, p.13. Although it was directly elected only about one in ten of the town's population are estimated to have qualified as voters.
  - (12) D. Warren, "The role of the Cape Town Municipality in Cape politics, 1848-1853", unpublished paper, University of Cape Town, 1989, p.4.
  - (13) Ordinance 4 of 1839, which came into operation in 1840. The function of the Commissioners included the responsibility of providing street watchmen, fire engines, erecting lamp posts, keeping streets in repair, municipal finances, control of Somerset Hospital, waste lands, markets, the shambles, the public granary, weights and measures, and the general health of the community. Wardmasters were to maintain a register of inhabitants, voters, births, deaths and property valuations as well as to report public nuisances and contravention of health regulations. In practise many of these services were inadequate or entirely neglected.



Thus, in spite of these increased powers, during the next twenty years,<sup>(14)</sup> the Board of Commissioners and Wardmasters made only limited progress towards solving Cape Town's water shortage. Its most significant contribution was the building of two adjoining storage reservoirs below the Oranjezicht Estate [see map 3], at a total cost of £10 800.<sup>(15)</sup> The first of these, called the No.1 Reservoir, was completed in 1852, and had a capacity ten times that of the Hof Street 'water house' which had served the town since 1816.<sup>(16)</sup> The No.2 Reservoir, which was completed in 1860, held 12 000 000 gallons, almost five times that of its sister reservoir.<sup>(17)</sup> But the No.1 and No.2 reservoirs only extended the supply of water available during the dry summer months, and no new sources of water supply outside of 'Table Valley' were exploited by the municipality. Indeed when contrasted with the town's growing consumption of water, the supply provided by the two storage reservoirs was hopelessly inadequate.

The reason for the slow progress in augmenting water supply is to be found in three fundamental flaws in the constitution of the Municipal Board, namely; the complete lack of authority to raise loans for improvements; the existence of conflicting interests between the Board of Commissioners and Wardmasters, and finally, the lack of power to expropriate land necessary for securing water. Furthermore the Board failed in its attempt to make the waterworks self financing, thus the augmentation of water supply came to represent an direct burden on ratepayers and municipal resources.<sup>(18)</sup>

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- (14) Ordinance 4 of 1839 was to expire after a twenty year period.
  - (15) 3/CT 1/4/4/4/6/1, Augmentation of Water Supplies, 1914-1915, Memoranda on Cape Town water Supply Works, pp.11-12.
  - (16) 3/CT 1/4/4/4/8/1, Appendix A, p.2.
  - (17) 3/CT 1/4/4/4/6/1, Memoranda, p.12.
  - (18) D. Warren, "Merchants, Commissioners and Wardmasters", p.113.

Soon after its establishment the Municipal Board attempted to offset the cost of providing water by levying a variety of additional taxes. This was resisted by the colonial government, which resented any extension of the Board's authority. In the 1840's Cape Town had attempted to levy a special water rate on the residents of the Green Point municipality which it was obliged to supply with water in terms of the municipal ordinance, but this had been blocked by government intervention.<sup>(19)</sup> In 1841 the Commissioners had also attempted to levy a rate on water supplied to the colonial government, but this was rejected by the authorities in 1843.<sup>(20)</sup> In the following year the municipality sought to impose a rate on water used from springs on private estates, but this was also strongly resisted.<sup>(21)</sup> Although a special water rate was charged for houses with private water leadings, these were few and brought in a negligible income.

The Board's failure to make the waterworks self financing should be measured against the fact that the municipality's overriding objective was to keep its expenditure to a minimum, as municipal income was mainly derived from house rates.<sup>(22)</sup> Furthermore, it is argued by Warren in his study of municipal politics during this period, that an important check on municipal expenditure came from the Wardmasters, who routinely reduced the annual estimates proposed by the Commissioners.<sup>(23)</sup> This reflected the

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- (19) In 1939 Municipality of Green Point claimed the right to Table Mountain's water supply. This was refused by the government in favour of the city. Instead, Cape Town had to supply Green Point with water at no profit. Although Green Point was charged for this water, the Commissioners were unsuccessful in attempting to apply a special water rate as was enforced in Cape Town.
  - (20) D. Warren, "Merchants, Commissioners and Wardmasters", pp.108-115. The Commissioners claimed that the civil and military departments of the colonial government wasted water because it was not rated. See 3/CT 1/1/5/3 APP622, Report of the Revenue Committee.
  - (21) D. Warren, "Merchants, Commissioners and Wardmasters", p.154.
  - (22) *ibid*, p.153.
  - (23) *ibid*, p.144.

Wardmaster's defence of the interests of householders and tenants<sup>(24)</sup> by keeping the municipal rate on fixed property as low as possible.<sup>(25)</sup>

Given the financial constraints imposed by wardmasters, as well as the inadequate powers of the municipal ordinance, the commissioners' main objective regarding water supply therefore seems to have been limited to economising on water consumption and consolidating existing sources of supply from the Table Mountain springs, thereby keeping expenditure to a minimum. Such an approach was hardly conducive to a long term solution to Cape Town's water supply, while any sudden change in supply or demand could precipitate a crisis.

Thus it happened in the mid 1850's, Cape Town's already precarious water supply was further restricted by a series of events, resulting in a severe water and sanitation crisis. By the end of the decade the issue of water supply was to bring the town's entire system of government into question. While the Municipal Board received the blame for the crisis, the water shortages may be attributed to a variety of factors beyond its control.

One of the underlying causes of the water shortage of the 1850's was that the Municipal Board did not have access to all available sources of water supply. Most streams and springs within Table Valley belonged to privately owned estates; some of which had entailed rights.<sup>(26)</sup> Consequently, much of the Board's expenditure on water supply during this and later periods was

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(24) D. Warren, "Merchants, Commissioners and Wardmasters", p.142.

(25) *ibid*, p.144.

(26) For example the important Oranjezicht Estate owned by the Van Breda family was entailed. This was eventually removed by parliament in the 1870's.

directed at acquiring these water rights. Without the power to expropriate land with fair compensation, this proved to be an extremely expensive exercise. As agricultural land was of little value without water, the municipality often had to purchase entire estates as well as water mills owning water rights, in order to acquire access to springs.<sup>(27)</sup> One typical example was that of the Hope Mill which was bought in 1842, for the sum of £3000, the land being resold without its water rights at a loss of almost £2000.<sup>(28)</sup> The cost of this single acquisition should be compared to that of the No.1 Reservoir, which was completed ten years later at a total cost of £2700, <sup>(29)</sup> including the purchase of the site.

- (27) Between 1840 and 1868 the following water rights and properties were acquired by the municipality. The table below reveals that numerous small sites had to be purchased at a relatively high cost in comparison to municipal income.

DATE	PURCHASE	COST	YIELD Gallons p.d.
Pre-1840	Main Spring	-	200 000
1840	Waterhof Spring	-	30 000
1842	Hope Mill/ water rights	£3000	30 000
1854	Orchard/Vineyard springs	£14000	30 000
	Oranjezicht Estate		
1862	Waterhof Estate water rights	£ 858	-
1865	Leeuenhof Estate spring	£ 2024	-
1865	Hanover Street spring		
1867	Kotzee's spring	£ 2200	15 000
1868	Various springs & Watermills		
	Annandale Mill, and rights to		30 000
	Platteklip and Silver Streams	£ 7646	20 000
c1870	Silberbauers Mill; Bulls Mill		
	Truters Mill; De Wets Mill		
	Wichts Mill.	£ 6439	-

Sources: A.4-1877; A9-1887.

Between 1840 and 1880 an estimated £250 000 was spent on Cape Town's waterworks including pipes, water rights and the reservoirs. (Mayoral Minute 1881) Annual municipal income rose from less than £10 000 in the 1840's to £30 000 by 1880.

- (28) A15-1879, Cape of Good Hope (Colony), Report of the select committee on the Oranjezicht purchase, p.1.
- (29) 3/CT 1/4/4/4/6/1, Augmentation of Supplies, 1914-1915, Memoranda on Cape Town Water Supply Works, p.11.

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By the 1850's the Board's attempt to augment the town's water supply was frustrated by a growing reluctance of landowners to give up the remaining water rights over the Table Valley springs. In the 1840's, the Board had purchased the night rights of various springs,<sup>(30)</sup> but now sought to extend its control over the full 24 hour supply, posing a threat to agriculture and water operated mills in the valley. The site of the No.1 reservoir, whose construction had been completed in 1852, had been selected so as to receive additional water from untapped springs in the Oranjezicht area. In 1854 the municipality entered into negotiations with the van Breda family, the owners of Oranjezicht Estate, whereby an agreement was reached exempting this property from rates in exchange for a further 30 000 gallons per day from the Vineyard Spring to supplement the reservoir.<sup>(31)</sup> This agreement was challenged by the owners of the Gort Molen Mill who were entitled to use of this spring water,<sup>(32)</sup> a claim which was upheld by the courts.<sup>(33)</sup> An appeal against this decision was made and lost. The municipality refused to pay Breda's costs<sup>(34)</sup> which resulted in his cutting off the town's supply from the smaller Lemmetjies Spring in retaliation.<sup>(35)</sup> Already faced

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- (30) As water powered mills did not operate at night, water was used during these hours to replenish the Cape Town's reservoirs
- (31) A15-1879, p.47. The Oranjezicht Estate was Cape Town's most important source of water, from which the municipality received 27 000 gallons daily. Apart from concessions on property rates, by the late 1880's the Van Breda family had been paid an amount of £14 000 for the use of water. See A9-1887, Cape of Good Hope(Colony), Report of the select committee on Wynberg and Cape Town Water Supply Bills, Appendix O.
- (32) *ibid.*, p.47. The owners of the mill were Mr. Prince and Mr. Collison. Water was purchased by the hour, thus, the mills which operated during the daytime would use the day supply, while the municipality would use the night supply to fill the storage reservoirs. See A1-1859, p.34.
- (33) A15-1879, *op.cit.*, p.47.
- (34) *ibid.*, p.47. The municipality had agreed to pay van Breda's costs for the initial court case, but not for the appeal.
- (35) *ibid.*, p.47.

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with a shortfall in anticipated supply, the municipality encountered an additional problem when the No.1 reservoir developed a leak, further reducing the town's water supply from this source.<sup>(36)</sup>

As a result of this controversy, the Board had to reconsider its plans to build a second reservoir below the Orangezicht estate, the construction of which was due to begin in 1856. Alternative sites that had been contemplated included a dam on Platteklip Stream, but this was both difficult and costly to build, and there were objections that it would interfere with the rights of the town's 300 washerwomen who were dependant on it for their livelihood.<sup>(37)</sup> Suggestions that the springs at Newlands be used were also dismissed because of their distance from Cape Town.

By the late 1850's Cape Town's water supply was rapidly approaching a point of crisis as a result of the Board's inability to gain total control over the Table Valley springs. Apart from shortages of water for domestic and commercial consumption, the lack of water to flush the rudimentary drainage and sewerage system was to pose a serious threat to public health. Added to this was filthy state of the back streets and steeps inhabited by the underclasses. Overcrowding was commonplace with cases of up to sixty people living in a house, sometimes with two or three families to a room.<sup>(38)</sup> A further

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(36) C5-1859, Cape of Good Hope (Colony), Report and Proceeding of the Committee of the Legislative Council on the Water Supply Bill, p.25.

(37) un-numbered: Cape of Good Hope (Colony), Report of the Select Committee appointed to inquire into the Sanitary State of Cape Town, June 1857, p.97.

(38) un-numbered: Cape of Good Hope (Colony), Report of the Select Committee appointed to inquire into the Sanitary State of Cape Town, June 1857, pp.36-36. In St John's Street a house owned by a baker was occupied by 62 people. About 10% of the town's population lived in Loop and Long Street. An average of 10 people per house was estimated for Cape Town.

cause for concern was that only about one fifth of Cape Town's houses were supplied with water supply, with the remainder relying on public fountains.<sup>(39)</sup> This situation was to lead to the appointment of a parliamentary select committee in June 1857 to inquire into the sanitary state of Cape Town and means to raise finance for a drainage system.<sup>(40)</sup> The government's concern over the situation was justified, for in the following year the town suffered a serious outbreak of smallpox.<sup>(41)</sup>

Evidence put before the Select Committee suggests that social and sanitary conditions in Cape Town had deteriorated since the 1830's.<sup>(42)</sup> Dr. Laing, the Port Health Officer and Police Surgeon,<sup>(43)</sup> suggested that overcrowding had arisen since Emancipation, as most of the town's servants "slept out of the houses".<sup>(44)</sup> Laing advocated the introduction of a "sanitary law", and insisted that all landlords get water laid on in their houses.<sup>(45)</sup> Furthermore, he believed, perhaps rather naively, that the Municipality should be made to "cut off the public pumps" as a measure to "force all landlords to lay on water".<sup>(46)</sup>

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- (39) South African Commercial Advertiser, 9 February 1848.
  - (40) un-numbered: Cape of Good Hope (Colony), Report of the Select Committee appointed to inquire into the Sanitary State of Cape Town, June 1857.
  - (41) Cape Argus, 30 October 1858. 148 deaths were reported from smallpox.
  - (42) When generally compared to overcrowding described by S.Judges, "Life in Cape Town in the 1830's".
  - (43) Laing's position as Health Officer was related to the harbour. As Police Surgeon he had an intimate knowledge of Cape Town's back streets, an area into which few of the upper and middle classes ventured.
  - (44) un-numbered: Cape of Good Hope (Colony), Report of the Select Committee appointed to inquire into the Sanitary State of Cape Town, June 1857, p.35. Laing commented: "That is the grand cause, I suspect, of all this huddling together... it may be a kind of wish to get out of a certain kind of restraint which they are subject to under the master's eye".
  - (45) *ibid*, p.47.
  - (46) *ibid*, p.48.

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The investigations of the Select Committee revealed that the Municipal Board was reluctant to construct a proper drainage system due to its expense, which was estimated at £20 000.<sup>(47)</sup> This represented a cost of £5 per house, or 15 shillings a head, which was strongly resisted by landed proprietors and householders.<sup>(48)</sup>

The Municipal Board's intransigent attitude towards the issue of sanitation and water supply stemmed from the fact that it was largely dominated by the Dutch rentier class, as well as a number of English-speaking property owners and speculators.<sup>(49)</sup> Although no thorough research exists detailing patterns of property ownership amongst the rentier class, it is not improbable that two or three dozen families owned about a quarter of Cape Town's housing stock.<sup>(50)</sup> Indeed in the mid 1850's the Wicht family alone was reported to own 374 houses<sup>(51)</sup> out of total of nearly 3500.<sup>(52)</sup> Property was a major source of investment in pre-industrial Cape Town. This gave rise to a situation where hire-houses were built by the rentier classes "where they liked and

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(47) un-numbered: Cape of Good Hope (Colony), Report of the Select Committee appointed to inquire into the Sanitary State of Cape Town, June 1857, p.12.

(48) *ibid*, pp.18-20.

(49) D.Warren, "The role of the Cape Town Municipality in Cape Politics", p.2. The commercial middle class is described by Warren as a heterogeneous group. "Its members ranged from bankers to brokers, landlords to lawyers, sheep farmers to shopkeepers. It seems to have been more a loose alliance of men with common aims than a distinct, self conscious class like the mercantile elite". Warren continues; "Many of the men from this group were colonial born, and the majority were Afrikaners".

(50) Apart from D.Warren's "Merchant's, Commissioners and Wardmasters", very little research has been conducted on property ownership in Cape Town.

(51) Cape Argus, 30 November 1858. Also D. Warren, "Property, Profit and Power: The Rise of a Landlord Class in Cape Town in the 1840's", in (ed) C. Saunders et al., Studies in the History of Cape Town, Volume 6, 1988, pp.47-48.

(52) J. Shorten, Cape Town, p.131.



how they liked, with no object but rent".<sup>(53)</sup> Of great concern to this rentier class was their desire to keep municipal expenditure to a minimum. Any large scale investment in a water and sanitation scheme that was financed on the basis of property rates would have had a negative impact on the investments of large scale property owners, particularly those owning rows of hirehouses.<sup>(54)</sup> This was clearly reflected in the city engineer's concern that his proposed plan to construct a drainage scheme should be done "gradually" to avoid opposition from "landed proprietors".<sup>(55)</sup> He warned that opposition would:

"appear mostly from the proprietors of houses which would have to be assessed to pay the debt. Their houses are highly mortgaged. They receive rent, and pay away the rent as the interest on the bond on their property....That class is still numerous in Cape Town and is also a class that is influential in the municipality".<sup>(56)</sup>

While the Select Committee recommended that an underground drainage system should be introduced to Cape Town, it failed to suggest how this could be financed. Although its main concern was that a proper sanitary system be introduced, it became apparent that water supply was the real problem. Within eighteen months a second select committee had been appointed to consider a water supply bill for Cape Town. By this time water shortages had reached critical proportions.

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- (53) R.W. Murray, South African Reminiscences, Cape Town, 1894, p.224.
- (54) D. Warren, "Merchant's Commissioners and Wardmasters". For example, one of the largest property owning families during this period were the Wichts', who owned up to 374 small houses, accommodating about 4000 people, or an eighth of the town's total population. See also H.W. Picard, Grand Parade; the birth of Greater Cape Town 1850-1913, (Cape Town), 1977, p.7.
- (55) un-numbered: Cape of Good Hope (Colony), Report of the Select Committee appointed to inquire into the Sanitary State of Cape Town, June 1857, p.21.
- (56) *ibid*, p.21.

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Worst affected by water shortages were the town's poor and the working classes, who relied on the public pump's and fountains, which were now shut off at night to conserve water. The consequences of this was described by Dr. Laing:

"...many [of the working class] being employed until late every day, have no time for carrying it.[water] They used to carry water at night when they came back from their work, but the pumps are now locked up at night."<sup>(57)</sup>

Consequently those who could afford it had to employ others to do so, paying up to 3 pence for two buckets.<sup>(58)</sup> Alternatively, they could rush to the pumps after work where:

"sometimes twenty or thirty buckets [are] waiting to be filled. There is also often a row there, through the people quarreling about the water."<sup>(59)</sup>

The Anglican Dean of Cape Town complained how this situation affected the coloured people of Reverend Lightfoot's congregation:

"It even affected the attendance of the children at his school; and he sees sometimes as many as twenty and thirty around the fountain, waiting to get their buckets filled, and as the children cannot carry great quantities they have to go oftener. He [Rev.Lightfoot] attributed the death of the child in the quarry to this want of water; it had gone there to get water for domestic wants, and had fallen in".<sup>(60)</sup>

The Dean added:

"Church of England Clergymen agree...[it is a matter of great importance] in order to make them cleanly, tidy, and respectable, all ought to have a better supply of water....All these horrid little lanes and streets ought to have water running through them, for they must be very unwholesome to the people living in them."<sup>(61)</sup>

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(57) A1-1859, Cape of Good Hope(Colony), Report of the Select Committee appointed to consider the Cape Town and Green Point Water Supply Bill, p10.

(58) *ibid.*, p.28.

(59) *ibid.*, p.28. This situation was typical of other colonial cities. In Sydney an almost identical scene was described by a contemporary observer in 1951: "Half the time of the poor is taken up in obtaining water from pumps, sometimes more than a quarter of a mile distant. at all hours of the day and night these pumps are at work; two and three o'clock in the morning, different parts of the neighbourhood are the scenes of water brawls, when the pumps are besieged in the struggles of the people for WATER" quoted in D.Clark, "'Worse than Physic': Sydney's Water Supply 1788-1888", M. Kelly (editor), Nineteenth-Century Sydney, 1978, p.56.

(60) *ibid.*, p.31.

(61) *ibid.*, p.31.

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Even the middle class householders who could afford to have private water leadings were not unaffected. While houses at sea level received an oversupply of water due to 'leaking brass water cocks', those at higher levels frequently received no water at all due to lack of pressure.<sup>(62)</sup> An additional problem for property owners, was the danger of fire as there was often no water available for the 'fire engines' to extinguish blazes, resulting in houses and businesses being burnt to the ground.<sup>(63)</sup>

A more serious problem, at least in the eyes of the colonial authorities, was the threat to industry, commerce and shipping. While the town's bakers and brewers frequently complained of shortages,<sup>(64)</sup> it was shipping that was worst affected as it drew about 20% of Cape Town's water supply, being up to 50 000 to 60 000 gallons per day.<sup>(65)</sup> Instances were reported of ships which had been turned away without water,<sup>(66)</sup> posing a serious threat to Cape Town's commerce. Furthermore the demand for water made by shipping had been particularly felt during the Indian Mutiny of 1856-7, which saw a large increase of ships bound for India, taxing Cape Town's water supply to the limit.<sup>(67)</sup>

By the end of the 1850's Cape Town had little to show for the money the Board had spent on augmenting water supply, apart from

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(62) *ibid.*, p.37.

(63) *ibid.*, pp.1-2; 31-34. Cape Town had a single fire engine which belonged to the colonial engineer's department; see A.F. Hattersley, An Illustrated social History of South Africa, Cape Town, 1969, p.178.

(64) C.5-1859, *op.cit.*, p.128.

(65) *ibid.*, p.23. This represented approximately 20% of Cape Town's water supply.

(66) *ibid.*, p.23.

(67) C.5-1859, *op.cit.*, p.25. The impact this had on the town's water supply is given in example, where transit ships, carrying 200 horses each, required 70 tons of water (14 000 gallons) for the animals alone. Furthermore, the advent of steam ships was to put increasing demands on water supply.

the leaking No.1 reservoir and with a second reservoir only partially constructed. As a result of the deteriorating situation, opposition to the Municipal Board began to gather momentum. Calls for municipal reform and reports of Cape Town's unsanitary state filled the local press.<sup>(68)</sup> At the forefront of calls for municipal reform were the town's merchants and businessmen, particularly chandlers, bakers, brewers and other industries such as printing, tanning and woolwashing, which depended on a regular and plentiful supply of water.<sup>(69)</sup> The concerns of the rentier classes for a low municipal rate was contrary to the needs of businessmen, who were to lead the struggle for municipal reform between 1859 and 1861, challenging the vested interests which dominated the Board of Commissioners and Wardmasters. This coincided with the expiry of the 1840 municipal ordinance in 1860, providing an opportunity to attempt to reform the municipality and redefine its authority. The political turmoil that arose out of the water supply crisis represents a major turning point in the Cape Town's municipal history, in which the future course of the town's government was to be decided.

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(68) H.W.J. Picard, Grand Parade, The Birth of Greater Cape Town 1850-1913, Cape Town, 1969, pp. 5-7.

(69) Although no figures are available detailing water consumption by business and industry in the 1850's, statistics from the 1870's reveal that flour mills; tanneries woolwashing establishments; bakeries and breweries were the largest consumers of water. see A.15-1879, Appendix M.

THE MUNICIPAL CRISIS OF 1859-1861

While the challenge against the Board of Commissioners and Wardmasters from Cape Town's merchant and commercial classes had arisen out of the issue of sanitation and water supply, it was reinforced by deeper political antagonisms that had developed amongst the dominant classes during the 1840's. Indeed the struggle to reform the municipality was in effect a part of a larger political struggle that was taking place within the dominant classes.

It has been argued by Warren that from 1844, the Board of Commissioners had been abandoned by the elite merchant class, disillusioned by the "growing radicalism of the municipality, and its promotion of the business, property and political interests of Cape Town's burgeoning landlord and commercial class".<sup>(70)</sup> By the late 1840's this process was accelerated, with a loosely defined group of merchants, shopkeepers and professional men withdrawing their political support from the Municipal Board as a result of the Convict Crisis of 1849.<sup>(71)</sup>

The source of these divisions may be attributed to the split in the Anti-Convict Association in 1849, when 'radicals' exploited the convict crisis to use the municipality as a vehicle to mobilise popular support and to challenge the authority of the

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(70) D. Warren, "Merchants, Commissioners and wardmasters", p.152

(71) D. Warren, "The role of the Cape town municipality in cape politics, 1848-1853", unpublished paper, University of Cape Town, 1989, pp.6-16.

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colonial government itself.<sup>(72)</sup> The group that dissociated itself from the radical movement were overwhelmingly English-speaking merchants, businessmen and the professional classes, who had closer ties with Britain. Indeed R.W. Murray, the editor of the Cape Argus noted that the "race feeling between Dutch and English which the anti-convict [crisis] increased and hardened became very strong" during the 1850's.<sup>(73)</sup> The political divisions that emerged in Cape Town were not simply based on ethnic rivalry, for they coincided with the conflicting economic interests of merchants and the rentier classes within the local government. This was reflected in the fact that the merchant interest was expressed through the town's Commercial Exchange and the Mechanics Institute,<sup>(74)</sup> in contrast to the largely Dutch rentier class's dominance of the Town House.

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- (72) D. Warren, "The role of the Cape Town Municipality in Cape Politics", op.cit., p.14. See also R.F.M. Immelman, Men of Good Hope; The Romantic Story of The Cape Town Chamber of Commerce; 1804-1954, (Cape Town), 1955, p.153. The ultras were led by J.A.H. Wicht, one of Cape Town's largest property owners, and whose real intention was "to promote Dutch ascendancy and accustom the Afrikaaner to public meetings, agitation, and political feuds". It is suggested that the rift in the Anti-Convict Association was to impact on the loose alliance of the commercial middle classes leaving the radical property owners in control of the municipality, who asserted their interests, thus opening the way to future conflict with the town's commercial and merchant interests.
- (73) R.W. Murray, South African Reminiscences, p.5.
- (74) R.F.M. Immelman, Men of Good Hope; and R.F.M. Immelman, "A Mechanics' Institute in Cape Town (1855-78)", in Quarterly Bulletin of the South African Library, Volume 11, no.1, September 1956, pp.19-26. The Commercial Exchange building was a focal point for Cape Town's Chamber of Commerce. During the 1850's the merchant interests was directed through Commercial Exchange with regard to municipal and parliamentary politics. Leading members of the Mechanics Institute included many among the merchant and professional classes such as, Saul Solomon; John Fairbairn (publisher); J. Rose-Innes (Superintendent General of Education); William Porter (Attorney General) and William Blore (merchant). The Institute was almost exclusively representative of the English-speaking middle class with few artisans being members. It was influential during the 1850's and 1860's with the influx of skilled artisans for the construction of public works such as the harbour, railway and hospital. It sought to introduce sanitary and municipal improvement, and its dissemination of such knowledge represented an important link between Cape Town and Europe.

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With the establishment of the Legislative Council in 1854, these divisions became more pronounced and ultimately spilt over into the municipal arena. The merchant class became frustrated over the failure of the Commercial Exchange interest to gain representation in the Legislative Council in 1854 largely due to to opposition from householders and tenants. However in 1858, John Stein,<sup>(75)</sup> the Commercial Exchange's candidate was elected at the head of the poll because as R.W. Murray aptly put it "they [the Commercial Exchange] had the wealth, and and [in] Cape Town votes were as purchaseable as snoek and rice"<sup>(76)</sup> Stein's successful election to the Legislative Council was also due to his strong campaign for municipal reform during the prevailing water and sanitation crisis which was now affecting merchants and householders alike. Despite the calls for municipal reform, R.W. Murray noted that "no merchant of any standing, nor capitalist, would have anything to do with municipal work."<sup>(77)</sup>

The merchants reluctance to participate in elections for the Municipal Board in part stemmed from their perception of it as a demeaning occupation, but opposition from Dutch householders and the rentier class's hold over their tenants would have made success unlikely. Instead merchants sought to weaken the power of the municipality, and with it the power of the rentier class. The water and sanitation crisis represented an opportunity to challenge the Board while the expiry of the municipal ordinance in 1860 gave them the means with which to redefine the municipality's authority.

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(75) R.W. Murray, South African Reminiscences, p.4. John Stein was a prominent merchant of Hamilton Ross and Company. His successful election was followed by another city merchant, J.D. Thomson, of Thomson and Watson and Company.

(76) *ibid.*

(77) *ibid*, p.226.

The critical water shortages of the late 1850's therefore acted as a trigger for Cape Town's merchant and business classes who blamed the Commissioners and Wardmasters for the deteriorating situation, accusing them of self interest and negligence. The attack against the municipal board was spearheaded by Saul Solomon, a prominent member of the Legislative Council and publisher of the Cape Argus.<sup>(78)</sup> The press, particularly Solomon's Cape Argus, had been at the forefront of demands for municipal reform and calls for an adequate sanitation system and a proper water supply for the town. Indeed, throughout the 1850's, newspapers had focused on the plight of the poor, and revealed the role of the landlords who contributed to the unsanitary state of the town.<sup>(79)</sup> Since its establishment in 1857, the Cape Argus had served as a mouthpiece for Solomon, incessantly attacking the municipal board on a wide range of issues throughout the 1860's. Of particular significance was the linkage it made between the problem of sanitation and water supply. The thrust of the reports of the Cape Argus appear to be aimed at not only the middle class, but also the working class, who formed an important part of the municipal board's electoral support. Indeed frequent accusations were levelled at landlords who bullied their tenants to return 'dirty' candidates to the Town House. Reformers recognised this and attempted to drive a wedge between the landlords and the working class ratepayers and tenants hoping to unhinge their power base.

In a series of articles the Cape Argus criticised both the unsanitary state of the town and the vacillating attitude of the Commissioners to municipal reform. Cape Town's system of drainage was condemned as "utterly barbarous",<sup>(80)</sup> and warned

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(78) Saul Solomon, the owner of a steam press and publisher, was acutely affected by water shortages and at one stage was forced to use saline well water in order to keep operating.

(79) The Cape Argus reported a series of court cases in 1858 drawing public attention to the unsanitary conditions of hirehouses and the negligence of landlords.

(80) Cape Argus, 26 January 1861.



that 'underground drainage' without water would represent "the greatest curse to befall this city".<sup>(81)</sup> The Cape Argus went on to caution:

"Instead of scores of children dying in our back streets, we would have hundreds and hundreds of adults into the bargain....The only thing that has saved the city from typhus and cholera hitherto, has been the absence of underground sewerage...[because] we have never had water sufficient to flush such drains if we had them."<sup>(82)</sup>

The Cape Argus advised that the town first priority was the provision of water as the "want of water lies at the root of all mischief".<sup>(83)</sup> Furthermore it suggested, "when we have as much water as we can use, we can carry out a proper system of underground sewerage, ...provide drinking fountains, and public benefits for the working class"<sup>(84)</sup> This attitude of benevolence which prevailed amongst reformers in the 1850's, will later be contrasted to the changed attitudes of the 1870's and 1880's, where the working classes came to be seen as a major obstacle to municipal reform.

Solomon was supported by many of the leading members of the Commercial Exchange and public figures including amongst others; Dr. Rose-Innes; C Fairbridge; E Syfret; M Twentyman, R.W. Murray and W. Blore.<sup>(85)</sup> While Solomon's first attempts at galvanising the town to act on the water crisis appear to have been nonpartisan and partly philanthropic through his concern for the suffering of the underclass, it soon became apparent that the

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(81) Cape Argus, 31 January 1861.

(82) *ibid.*

(83) Cape Argus, 26 January 1861.

(84) *ibid.*

(85) Dr. Rose-Innes was the Colony's Superintendent General of Education; C.A. Fairbridge was an attorney; E Syfret had interests in accounting, assurance and a trust company; R.Murray was editor of the Cape Argus, W.Blore was a prominent member of the mechanics institute.

call for municipal reform was an extension of long-standing social and economic rivalry and political antagonism dividing the Cape Town's elite.<sup>(86)</sup>

In March 1859, Solomon called a meeting at the Commercial Exchange, ostensibly to discuss all possible solutions to the problem of water supply.<sup>(87)</sup> When it became apparent that Solomon was intent on reforming the municipality itself by removing its control over the waterworks, and investing these powers in an independent water board, a widespread struggle developed between the merchant interests of the Commercial Exchange and the Commissioners and their supporters.<sup>(88)</sup> At a further meeting at the Commercial Exchange a committee was established to draw up a bill to petition parliament to create an independent water board with wide powers enabling it to supply Cape Town and the Municipality of Green Point as well as shipping.<sup>(89)</sup> The Commissioners and their supporters however saw this as an attempt to dilute the power of the municipal boards, thereby usurping their political dominance within the town.

Expressing these fears, supporters of the municipal board were to complain that the meetings held at the Exchange did not represent

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(86) The divisions that had emerged during the convict crisis were deepened in 1853 over the franchise question. Dutch speaking citizens aligned themselves with the coloured voters and liberals against the high franchise qualifications. This is likely to have reinforced the bonds between the Dutch property owning families at the municipal level, strengthening their economic interests through their control of the Town House, at the expense of the increasingly alienated the commercial and merchant classes. (see footnote #178)

(87) C.5-1859, Cape of Good Hope (Colony), Report and Proceedings of the Committee of the Legislative Council on the Water Supply Bill, p.58.

(88) *ibid.*, p.1. Property owners organised a petition against the proposed water supply bill, containing 907 signatures and representative of £600 000 of landed property.

(89) *ibid.*, pp.58-62.

the interest of the "old inhabitants of town" and that they "were carried [out] in English",<sup>(90)</sup> which both symbolised and confirmed perceptions that the protests represented a threat to the Dutch landholder's hegemony within local government. Indeed, the Swedish merchant J. Letterstedt, who opposed the creation of a water board out of self-interest,<sup>(91)</sup> told a government enquiry into Solomon's proposed Water Bill, that the Commissioners had the support of the majority of the town, "and particularly the Dutch Community", meaning "the landholders and householders".<sup>(92)</sup> The supporters of the Board also resented the fact that the party "outside of the Townhouse" <sup>(93)</sup> was "constantly abusing the Commissioners" as well as labeling them "a very dirty lot, because they do not clean the town".<sup>(94)</sup> English-speaking property owners who supported the Board were more cautious, describing the supporters of reform as "respectable merchants and shopkeepers" but at the same time criticised them for constantly complaining yet failing to "take their turn at the municipality".<sup>(95)</sup> Indeed, the English-speaking merchant minority represented on the Board of Commissioners, such as its chairman Hercules Jarvis,<sup>(96)</sup> seem to have to have been in an ambivalent position, torn between the responsibility to keep the town clean as well as to keep rates low, to the satisfaction of large

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(90) C.5-1859, p.78.

(91) *ibid.*, pp.84-88; p.103. Although J Letterstedt may be included among the ranks of the mercantile élite, he opposed the creation of a water board for personal reasons. Suggestions had been made that Cape Town's water be drawn from springs in the Newlands and Rondebosch area. Letterstedt had vested interests in these, which would have been compromised if they were taken over for Cape Town's water supply.

(92) *ibid.*

(93) *ibid.*, p.34. The words of P.J. Denyssen, a former secretary to the municipality.

(94) *ibid.*, p.77. The words of a Mr Robertson, a former Wardmaster.

(95) *ibid.*, p.79.

(96) see appendix A for select biography.

property owners; a dilemma which is reflected in contemporary doggerel:

"What Boots\* if that day after day  
Little Hercules sits in his chair  
And cries cle[an]se the Town while his sapient chums  
Talk twaddle in Green Market Square".(97)

Aside from fears that the reformers were attempting to usurp the authority of the Town House, the conflict over reform and water supply was essentially one of conflicting economic interests within the town's elite classes, between those who needed water and those who would have to pay for it. This is revealed in the concern of landholders and property speculators to a clause in Solomon's Water Supply Bill giving the proposed Water Board powers to borrow up to £50 000, as well as a further clause which stipulated that it would have to supply between 25 and 50 gallons free to each household.(98) It was feared that the cost of providing water in this quantity would ultimately have to be borne by large scale property owners. Indeed one large property owner, J.M. Maynard openly argued that "houses tenanted by Malays and fishermen, being provided with a private water leading,...will be a continual drain upon the pocket of the proprietor" as the tenants would be unable to bear the cost of water or increased rents.(99) Proponents of the Water Board

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(97) M.F. Cartwright, "The filthy state of Cape Town in 1858", in Quarterly Bulletin of the South African Library, Volume 33, 1978, p.56. Supposedly written by James Lycett, proprietor of the London Hotel in Longmarket Street. \* 'What Boots' is an archaic form of saying 'what matters'. Probably written in reaction to court cases against the unsanitary condition of hire houses and the municipalities inaction. One of the worst offences by the slumlords was that of R.H.Arderne, who was prosecuted for building water closets over Capel Ditch, see C.5-59, p.21. Much publicity was generated in the press as a result of these court cases.

(98) C.5-1859.

(99) C.5-1859, p.107.

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agreed that the landed proprietors should feel threatened by this bill as:

"...it will meddle with their supposed vested rights. They have been long accustomed to gather where the have not strawed\*, and to supply themselves, and numerous tenants, with that which has cost them nothing" (100)

Solomon's attempts to establish an independent water board was met with stiff resistance. The Board's Chairman, Hercules Jarvis and eleven other Commissioners petitioned parliament against the Water Bill, being supported by 907 inhabitants of the town representing £600 000 of property. (101) This was countered by a petition of over 800 names organised by Solomon. The fate of the Bill was finally sealed when it was referred to a Committee of the Legislative Council, which was chaired by none other than J.A.H. Wicht(MLC), Cape Town's largest landed proprietor, who was instrumental in recommending its deferral. (102)

Soon after the Legislative Council had shelved Solomon's water bill, the Board Commissioners hastened to draw up their own Municipal Bill to introduce before parliament during the 1860 session to replace the 1840 municipal ordinance which was due to expire at the end of that year. The Bill was challenged, for differing reasons, by both the Wardmasters and the supporters of municipal reform. (103) This ultimately was to result in its

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(100) C.5-1859, p.133.

\*archaic form of strewned.

(101) C.5-1859, p.1. For the original petitions see Legislative Council of the Cape of Good Hope LCB 282 (petitions) no.3 and no.33, 1859. These petitions reflect ethnic, racial and economic divisions. The names on the Commissioner's petition are at least 75% of Dutch and Malay origin. The names appearing on Solomon's petition contain approximately 20% of Dutch origin.

(102) Hercules Jarvis was another MLC serving on this committee, and undoubtedly recommended that the bill be deferred

(103) Wardmaster's rejection of the Municipal Bill related to an earlier attempt on the part of the Commissioners to abolish the position of Wardmaster. S.C.2-1858, Cape of Good Hope (Colony), Report of the select committee appointed...for the purpose of considering and reporting upon certain petitions relative to a change in the Cape Town Municipal Ordinance.

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withdrawal, which was to effectively leave the municipality without a constitution by the beginning of 1861 upon the expiry of the 1840 ordinance.

The main intention of the proposed 1859 Municipal Bill had been to strengthen the power of the Commissioners by abolishing the position of Wardmasters which were seen as an impediment to the administration of the town. Hercules Jarvis, who had been a Commissioner since 1840, criticised the system of two boards, blaming it for many of the municipality's shortcomings, explaining that:

"There has always been since the establishment of the municipality, more or less clashing of interests, and thereby the public have suffered....(104)

Jarvis added that:

"the dirty, filthy state of Cape Town since January last, can alone be attributed to to the clashing of interests of the Commissioners and Wardmasters.(105)

This 'clash of interests' was not one of class conflict,(106) but rather a reflection of the Wardmasters function, who, being in closer contact with householders, were more responsive to their needs, particularly to repeated attempts to shift the burden of taxation from the rentier classes to their tenants.(107) A more basic explanation for the Wardmasters' rejection of the municipal bill was that it would have legislated them out of office.

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(104) A.2-1859, Cape of Good Hope (Colony), Report of the Select Committee appointed to take into consideration the Cape Town Municipal Bill, p.22.

(105) *ibid.*, p.23.

(106) *ibid.*, pp.59-60. For example, a former wardmaster, a Mr Powrie, stated that both boards were 'composed' of "about the same class of men", and that there were "very many wealthy men among the wardmasters, as well as amongst the commissioners".

(107) D.Warren. "Merchants, Commissioners and Wardmasters", pp.142-143.

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The municipal reformers, still smarting from their defeat, saw the Commissioners' municipal bill, which was already under attack from the Wardmasters, as an opportunity to campaign for the inclusion of key aspects of their defunct Water Supply Bill in the proposed municipal bill. Of particular significance to the reformers was a clause which would have made it compulsory for the municipality to supply up to 50 gallons of water daily, free to each household. By including this in the municipal bill it was hoped that this would force the development of further water supplies, as well as contribute towards solving the town's sanitation problem.

As a result of the extensive opposition from the Wardmasters and reformers, a Select Committee of the Legislative Assembly recommended amendments to the municipal bill, retaining the office of Wardmaster and inserting the important 'water clauses'. Faced with a bill "so altered" that it now provided "ample water to the poor householders, at the expense of the rich",<sup>(108)</sup> the Commissioners called on all their resources to prevent their own amended bill from being approved by parliament. Thus, it was as a last resort that the bill was blocked by Wicht and his associates in the Legislative Council.<sup>(109)</sup> The cost of this action was high for the Commissioners, for without an enabling bill, the municipality was left without any statutory rights upon the expiry of the 1840 municipal ordinance at the end of 1860.

Thus, due to the machinations of the Commissioners, the municipality was now without an ordinance or means to provide for an adequate water supply. By early 1861 the mood of the town

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(108) Cape Argus, 2 March 1861.

(109) ibid. Wicht's 'party' in the Legislative Council included not only colonial men such as, J.M. Louw and H.Jarvis, but also english 'liberal' members with whom they had allied over the franchise question.

began to sway against the Board of Commissioners who continued to resist renewed attempts to remove the waterworks from the municipality's control.

As a result of the vacuum brought about by the expiry of the municipal ordinance at the beginning of 1861, the Commissioners called a public meeting to decide on the future of the municipality. The Commissioners astutely presented ratepayers with a proverbial Hobson's choice: to support the reintroduction of the Board's original municipal bill, or the versions amended by the Legislative Assembly or that amended by the town council.<sup>(110)</sup> By limiting ratepayers options the Commissioners hoped to avoid any attempt to revive the concept of a water board. The Board's attempt to manipulate the meeting was unsuccessful. The supporters of municipal reform, led by Solomon, made a second attempt at reintroducing the 1859 Water Bill at the ratepayers meeting, and to the dismay of the Commissioners once again demanded the establishment of a independent water board.<sup>(111)</sup>

The Board of Commissioners received a further setback when one of the members of the Legislative Assembly, J.M. Louw, who had previously been a party to the quashing of the 1859 water bill, now came out in favour of an independent water board at the meeting. Louw, who had recently returned from his first visit to England and Europe<sup>(112)</sup> had been impressed by the way in which "all towns were drained and well supplied with water".<sup>(113)</sup> Louw explained that he could not promise to support the Commissioner's Bill in Parliament as it "did not give the corporation sufficient power to carry out the improvements that were...desirable"<sup>(114)</sup>

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(110) Cape Argus, 29 January 1861.

(111) *ibid.*

(112) *ibid.*

(113) *ibid.*

(114) *ibid.*



and that if it were passed "Cape Town would remain another 21 years in much the same state as they saw it".<sup>(115)</sup> To the dismay of the Commissioners the meeting approved the reintroduction of Solomon's Water Bill by 44 votes to 39.<sup>(116)</sup> Once again the council stood to lose control over one of its most important assets while landlords faced the prospect of significant increases in water rates.

Stunned by their unexpected defeat the Commissioners called a second meeting to be held in March 1861, ostensibly to "clarify" the situation as the public had previously rejected the water bill in 1859.<sup>(117)</sup> The reformers now feared that the Commissioners would pack the second meeting at the Town House with their supporters,<sup>(118)</sup> enabling them to overturn the decision to reintroduce the water bill which had been taken at the meeting in January. The Cape Argus warned that the new meeting would be dominated by the "Maynard's and de Kortes of the Dirty Party" and therefore urged reform-minded citizen's to attend.<sup>(119)</sup> It posed the question whether:

"...the water supply of Cape Town is a matter of too vital importance to the colony at large to be placed in feeble or unworthy hands, and that, least of all, could persons in the position of large owners of small house property be entrusted with so very delicate a responsibility, in the discharge of which their peculiar interests must be found at variance with what should be the dictates of duty".<sup>(120)</sup>

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(115) Cape Argus, 29 January, 1861. Louw was referring to the 21 years that had passed since the establishment of the municipality in 1840. It is not without irony that exactly another 21 years were indeed to pass before the issue of water supply was settled in 1882.

(116) *ibid.*

(117) A.2-1861, Cape of Good Hope (Colony), Report of the Select Committee on the Municipal Water Supply Bill, p.3. The Board of Commissioners asserted that the ratepayers had rejected the proposed 1859 Water Bill by way of a petition.

(118) Cape Argus, 5 March 1861. Claims were made that the 'dirty party' had sent messages "to the Malays" to "bring them to the Townhouse", because "the water was to be taken away from them".

(119) Cape Argus, 2 March 1861.

(120) *ibid.*

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As a result of mobilisation, the meeting at the Town House was packed with supporters of both parties. Having called the meeting, the Commissioners had the advantage, and with the help of the chairman<sup>(121)</sup>, the landed proprietors; including Jarvis, van Breda, Watson, Maynard, Cauvin and Versfeld argued one after each other for the introduction of an amendment to municipal bill, with the stipulation that if every dwelling was to be supplied with a daily minimum of 25 gallons, that it should be paid for by the occupants.<sup>(122)</sup> While it is not certain whether this amendment had been prearranged; what was to follow, appeared to be a blatant manipulation of proceedings. The Cape Argus reported that when it came to the vote between Solomon's water bill and the amended municipal bill, clearly two thirds supported Solomon by a show of hands, yet the chairman declared he was unable to decide who was in the majority.<sup>(123)</sup> It was decided to divide the two parties into separate rooms for a count of heads but confusion broke out resulting in the chairman calling for a ballot.<sup>(124)</sup> This was rejected by the reformers as several hours had since passed and many of their supporters had returned to their businesses.<sup>(125)</sup> Solomon demanded that the meeting be reconvened at the Parade on the following day, and urged his supporters not to vote. The remaining supporters of the Commissioners however went ahead with the ballot, defeating Solomon's Bill by 399 votes to 9.<sup>(126)</sup>

On the following day a crowd of over 1000 people gathered on the Parade in support of the Water Bill,<sup>(127)</sup> in the biggest display of popular expression since the anti-convict protests of 1849.

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(121) The Chairman, Mr. Robertson, was a former wardmaster.

(122) Cape Argus, 5 March 1861.

(123) *ibid.*

(124) *ibid.*

(125) *ibid.*

(126) *ibid.*

(127) Cape Argus, 7 March 1861.

The gathering included many of Cape Town's most prominent merchants, businessmen and political leaders.<sup>(128)</sup> The meeting represented as much a display of support for water supply as a demonstration against the economic and political interests served by the "Dirty Party" of the Town House.<sup>(129)</sup> Indeed Solomon's speech in which he called for "cheap water for the poor" must be contrasted with the plea of the meeting's chairman, W.L.Blore,<sup>(130)</sup> that vote on Solomon's resolution, unlike the display at the Town House, be:

"put fairly to Englishmen, with English hearts, and having a proper appreciation of English liberty".<sup>(131)</sup>

Indeed Blore's sentiments reflect the wider antagonism of the mainly English-speaking merchants to the stranglehold which Cape Town's old Dutch families and the large landlords had over the government of the town. As was expected, Solomon's bill was adopted unanimously by the meeting which also proceeded to elect a committee to reintroduce the water bill to parliament later that year.<sup>(132)</sup> Within a matter of months it drew up a bill to constitute a new municipality and for the creation of a separate water board, which it went on to present before a select committee of the Legislative Assembly.

Given the manifestation of popular support in favour of the Water Bill, it is suprising to learn that it was destined to a similar fate as the original 1859 bill. When the new water bill was

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(128) Those present at the meeting included J.Stein(MLC); J.M Louw(MLA); C.Manuel(MLA); E.J.M. Syfret; M. Twentyman; P.J. van der Bijl; T.A. Andsel; A. Zeederberg and Reverend T. Lightfoot. All were representative of Cape Town's commercial and professional classes. Thomas Lightfoot was a leading cleric in Cape Town, later to become Archdeacon.

(129) Cape Argus, 7 March 1861.

(130) W.Blore. See Appendix for Select Biographies.

(131) Cape Argus, 7 March 1861.

(132) *ibid.*

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presented to the select committee the acting commissioners charged that the meeting had been unofficial and had no legal standing.<sup>(133)</sup> Realising that the bill might be blocked for a third time, the reform committee agreed to a compromise. Another reason for this was the 1840 municipal act had since expired and the town was without a legally constituted municipal government.<sup>(134)</sup> As a result the Water Bill was withdrawn and the Municipal Bill as amended by the Assembly in 1860, containing the free water clause was accepted in its place.<sup>(135)</sup>

The inclusion of the water clauses in the 1861 Municipal Act in effect represents a compromise between those amongst the commercial classes wanting water, and the large property owners who would have to pay for it. It was an unequal compromise, for the provisions of the 1861 Municipal Act left the power of the large property owners intact. Furthermore no adequate provision made for municipal borrowing which was necessary to finance improvements. Consequently little was done to implement the provisions of the water clauses over the next twenty years.

The new Municipal Bill represented only a minor improvement. Indeed the 1861 Municipal Bill was barely an advancement from the original 1840 municipal ordinance, as the structure of the Board of Commissioners and Wardmasters was left intact.<sup>(136)</sup> Only in 1867 did the Commissioners succeed in their original intention of abolishing the office of Wardmasters with the introduction of a revised Municipal Bill in that year.<sup>(137)</sup>

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(133) A.2-1861, op.cit. pp.3-6.

(134) *ibid.*, p.7. The 1840 municipal ordinance expired at the beginning of 1861. The municipality's legal status was tenuous particularly regarding the collection of rates and fines.

(135) *ibid.*, p.7.

(136) Act 1 of 1861. For example; the questionable system of two municipal boards, continued to operate until the Act was again amended in 1867. (Act 1 of 1867)

(137) Act 1 1867.

Given the defeat of Solomon in the struggle for an adequate water supply through the reform of municipality between 1859 and 1861, it must be asked what is the significance of this period. In remainder of this chapter it will be shown that the conflict over water supply and sanitation between 1859 and 1861 represents the initial stage of a process of reform that was only to reach fruition by the 1880's and the 1890's.

The real significance of the conflict was that it determined the direction in which the municipality was to develop. In retrospect Act 1 of 1861 represents an important point in Cape Town's municipal history; for if Solomon had succeeded in enacting the Water Bill, this would have effectively stripped the municipality of a significant part of its authority and potential revenue. It is possible that this may have initiated a process where municipal authority may have been fragmented amongst a variety of independant boards or under government authority.<sup>(138)</sup> Indeed it will be seen that the maintainance of municipal control over water supply was to prove vital, for in the early twentieth century Cape Town needed to assert its control over all major sources of water supply, in order to exercise political and economic dominance over the Cape Peninsula.

The conflict surrounding the problems of water supply, sanitation and municipal reform during this period are also important in that they represent the foundation of what was to become a prolonged struggle for control over the municipality between the emerging commercial class and the old rentier class. While the attempt to remove water supply away from municipal control was a consequence of the fact that the merchant interest was

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(138) The fragmentation of Cape Town's already limited municipal authority was a very real possibility during the 1860's. Apart from the attempt to remove the waterworks, the Table Bay Harbour Board was established in 1860, (Act 6 1860) giving merchants a greater influence over the development and functioning of the port facilities.

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politically too weak to compete for control over the Town House, by the 1870's the balance of power was to shift in their favour, allowing them to launch a direct political assault to break the rentier class's dominance of municipal government.

#### THE TOWN COUNCIL AND WATER SUPPLY 1861-1882

Although the 1861 and 1867 Municipal Acts may be regarded as important turning points, in so far as they represented an acceleration of the process towards a fully fledged municipal government,<sup>(139)</sup> the reconstituted municipality was unable to make any significant headway in improving Cape Town's squalid state by augmenting its water supply or developing a proper sanitation system. Although the Number Two reservoir below Oranjezicht had been completed in 1860, this provided no more than a breathing space for the town. While the onset of an economic depression during the 1860's prevented any further development, a more important reason for the lack of progress was that the Board of Commissioners and Wardmasters, and after 1867 the Town Council, continued to be dominated by the rentier classes and householders who were resistant to any suggestion of major social and economic reform of the municipality. Even after 1867, when the Board was abolished and replaced by an 18 member town council with increased powers, including authority to raise limited loans to finance public works,<sup>(140)</sup> the same attitude of economy continued to prevail over those of reform and improvement.

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(139) Act 1 of 1861. A municipal board was created and the municipality was divided into six districts each of which elected three members. Standing Committees were created for public works, general purposes, waterworks, finance, fire brigade, office establishment (municipal staff) and markets. All springs were placed in charge of a superintendent of waterworks. The position of Wardmaster was retained. See also J. Shorten, Cape Town, The Golden Jubilee of the Greater City, (Cape Town), 1963, p.132.

(140) Act 1 of 1867. Municipal borrowing powers were limited to £ 20 000, and the ratepayers consent.

As far as water supply was concerned, the same objectives of economising on consumption and consolidating existing sources of water supply remained the dominant policy. Indeed a significant amount of money spent on augmenting water supply in the 1860's and 1870's continued to be directed towards acquiring the rights of springs and streams in Table Valley.

As a result of council's conservative policy towards improvements, by the 1870's the position of Cape Town's water supply had, in real terms, deteriorated from that of the 1840's. While the municipality managed to increase the town's supply from a daily average minimum of 230 000 gallons in 1840 to 360 000 gallons in 1879, the population had doubled from approximately 20 000 to nearly 40 000 in the same period, which effectively reduced water consumption from 11.5 to 9 gallons per head.<sup>(141)</sup> Once again it was the underclass was worst affected, which, as always, bore the real cost of the unsanitary state of the town in terms of their high mortality rates. Descriptions of the effects of the water shortages echoed those of the 1850's. Most of the town, and especially the poor were still dependent on the public fountains for water. District Six was still largely reliant on well water which was often contaminated,<sup>(142)</sup> while areas of the town lying above the reservoirs, which included portions of Districts Two, Three and Four were without water as a lack of pumping equipment meant that pipes could not supply the higher levels.<sup>(143)</sup> During periods of drought or in the dry summer months, water was shut off at night,<sup>(144)</sup> and sometimes the public water pumps were chained up during the day.<sup>(145)</sup> During one particularly dry spell the effects of the water

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(141) A.15-1879, p.59.

(142) A.9-1888, Cape of Good Hope (Colony), Report of the select committee on Cape Town sanitation, p.2.

(143) *ibid.*, p.35.

(144) 3/CT 1/4/4/4/8/1, Appendix A, p.4.

(145) Cape Times, 28 January 1881.

restrictions on the city's poor was vividly described in one report, which bears a remarkable similarity to the situation in the 1850's:

"...the suffering from want of water is intense among the poorer class of people...when the pump handles are free so fierce is the competition for the use of them that weak folks have no chance in the struggle, and are compelled to go away empty." (146)

While the municipality's inaction was partly to blame for the deterioration in water supply, this must be seen against the background of an acceleration in the growth of the town's population from the mid-1870's, as a response to the discovery of diamonds near the Orange River in 1869. Indeed, the 1870's represent an important turning point in Cape Town's history, for the impact of rapid economic and physical growth was to provide a catalyst for a transformation of the municipality, as the existing civic institutions, as well as the men whose economic interests they served, were unable to meet the social and political demands being brought about by change.

The single biggest challenge facing the town was the increased demand for water, which continued to place an enormous strain on municipal government and its financial resources. Apart from supplying drinking water for the town itself, the municipality had to provide water for shipping, street watering, the fire service as well as for the cleaning of the shambles and fish market. The municipality did not possess the financial resources nor could it afford to employ the engineering skills needed to go beyond the Table Valley area for a long term solution for water supply.

The Town Council was not unsympathetic to the problems caused through insufficient water supply, yet it continued to baulk at undertaking any comprehensive scheme capable of providing a long

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(146) Cape Times, 28 January 1881.



term solution to the impending crisis. In 1872 a Special Committee had been appointed by the Town Council to investigate the whole question of water supply.<sup>(147)</sup> Although the Committee recommended that another much larger storage reservoir was needed, and went as far as to suggest a site at Breda's Field above the existing reservoirs,<sup>(148)</sup> the Town Council was reluctant to commit itself to this expenditure. Indeed, the problems brought about by water shortages, as well as the Council's inadequate reaction, brought about a crisis in municipal government in the late 1870's similar to that experienced the 1850's.

As in the 1850's, water shortages once again placed severe constraints on commerce and industry. By 1879 the town's industry drew almost 20% of the daily average water supply yet this was barely adequate.<sup>(149)</sup> The city engineer was to report that merchants were "very much distressed for the want of water" and frequently came to the Town House to complain.<sup>(150)</sup> It will be argued however that the response of the merchant and business interests differed in that some began to assume the responsibility of playing an active role in municipal politics in order to bring about reform.

The municipality's intransigence over this issue was broken in 1876, with the succession of Charles Lewis as mayor, who was one of a handful of reform-minded men had been elected on the council during the course of the 1870's. Lewis, (who was also to be

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(147) 3/CT 1/4/4/4/8/1, Appendix A, p.4.

(148) A.4-1877, Cape of Good Hope (Colony), Report of the select committee appointed to consider and report on the Cape town reservoir, p.1-3.

(149) A.15-1879, Appendix M. Of the daily average supply of 360 000 gallons, industry drew 72 859 gallons (20%); 84 000 gallons were distributed through public fountains (23%); while the remainder was used by shipping (20%); the corporation; the colonial and imperial authorities; and private households.

(150) A.15-1879, p.81.

elected onto the Legislative Assembly), represents one of the first major reformers within the council. His ascendancy points to a growing acceptance on the part of the town's merchants to involve themselves in local government, if their interests were to be served. Lewis's business as a ship chandler placed him amongst the town's merchant elite whose interests he reflected, many of whom were personally affected by the water shortages. (151)

Soon after his election Lewis criticised the shoddy manner in which the old reservoirs had been built and took a bold stand on the development of the future water supply. He chastised councillors opposed to the building of new reservoir, describing them and their supporters as:

"The cautious and economical citizens who dread incurring a debt [and who] will vote for making the most of our present appliances, tinkering up the old reservoir, changing lead for iron pipes by degrees, and trying to keep the drains flushed by utterly inadequate means". (152)

Lewis went on to suggest the way forward:

"Men of larger minds will advocate a substantial loan. Money spent in endeavouring to make a bad job good is simply thrown away. At best our existing reservoir, even if it would hold water, is incapable of holding water enough." (153)

Lewis's stand represents an important landmark in the history of the municipality, for unlike the challenge in the early 1860's, when the merchant interest outside of the council had attempted to weaken the municipality's authority, the mid-1870's signify the real beginning of the struggle for municipal reform which was to come from within the Town House itself. As the reform-minded businessmen's perception of local government as demeaning gradually gave way, leading merchants not only participated in

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(151) For example John Woodhead, whose iron foundry was effected by water shortages, sought election onto the town council with the specific purpose of dealing with the water problem.

(152) Cape Times, 17 August 1876.

(153) *ibid*.

Town House politics, but began to fight for political control over Cape Town's administration.

As Lewis had suggested, the first obstacle in the way of augmenting Cape Town's water supply was that the municipality lacked the authority to raise a substantial loan. This had long been resisted by the landlords as well as small property owners who feared increased taxation would result from municipal borrowing. However, the experience of the municipal corporations in Britain from the 1870's proved the opposite, as improvements financed by large loans in turn generated income for the municipal coffers, a fact that was not lost on local businessmen. Leading the campaign for the approval of a loan for a third reservoir was the recently established Cape Times, which was to play a central role in mobilising middle class opinion for the reform of the municipality by calling for the ousting of what it called the 'dirty party' controlling the Town House.

Apart from the attacks made on the town council by the Cape Times as well as the Cape Argus, further criticism came from the Governor of the Cape, Sir Bartle Frere, who chastised the municipality for the unsanitary state of the town.<sup>(154)</sup> By 1877, as a result of growing criticism, it had become generally accepted by the town council that the building of a third storage reservoir could no longer be avoided or delayed. As municipal borrowing powers were limited to a total of £20 000, the approval of parliament was necessary for the raising of a special loan for the sum of £46 813, which was the estimated cost to build a new reservoir.<sup>(155)</sup> Nevertheless, the so called 'dirty party' in the council continued to obstruct the efforts of the reformers, and resolved to build the reservoir in the cheapest possible way, resulting in the tender for its construction being awarded to a

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(154) Cape Times, 17 August 1876.

(155) A.4-1877, p.1.

contractor of dubious ability. Indeed the entire episode involving the construction of what was to become known as the Molteno Reservoir, developed into an embarrassment for the municipality, and was to play a significant part in the downfall of the 'dirty party' in the 1880's.

From the onset of the decision to build a new reservoir, the scheme was to be plagued by controversy. The site selected at 'Breda's field' was itself questionable as it represented an extension of the ongoing practice of consolidating the finite water supplies from existing sources within Table Valley rather than tapping larger supplies elsewhere in the Cape Peninsula.<sup>(156)</sup> Once again this proved to be expensive for the municipality as water rights had to be purchased along with the land which would lose its agricultural value without water. The owner of the Oranjezicht estate, G.H. van Breda, possessed water rights to seven springs, of which the municipality agreed to purchase the right for the use of two, along with a portion of the estate as a site for the reservoir, which was to be located above the existing No.1 and No.2 reservoirs.<sup>(157)</sup> Once the municipality bought the land and had begun constructing the reservoir, it was discovered that the water from the two springs was insufficient, and an attempt was made to gain access to the remaining five springs; an effort which was resisted by van Breda.<sup>(158)</sup> This was to spark a dispute within the Town House as

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- (156) J.G Gamble, Report of the water supply of Cape Town, (Cape Town), 1875, pp.1-16. In his report Gamble had recommended Table Mountain as the best source for a long term water supply. As the sources of water supply in Table Valley were being rapidly depleted, so the cost of purchasing water rights escalated. Although other sources of abundant water supply were known of elsewhere in the Cape Peninsula, the initial investment required to bring it to Cape Town, far outweighed the cost of purchasing Table Valley springs, even at inflated prices.
- (157) A.15-1879, op.cit., pp.2-3. The site had been recommended by John Gamble, the Hydraulic Engineer for the Colony, due to its proximity to the existing mains and distributing reservoir, as well as to the source of water supply from the Orangezicht Estate and the Platteklip stream.
- (158) *ibid.*, Appendix A, Petition of Gerrit Hendrik van Breda.

the reformist councillors controlling the waterworks committee were determined to go ahead with the scheme, regardless of the increased cost, and recommended that the municipality offer to purchase the entire Orangezicht Estate for a sum of £10 000.<sup>(159)</sup> This was strongly resisted by the leading 'dirty party' councillors P.J. Stigant and D.C. De Waal.<sup>(160)</sup>

The conflict surrounding the purchase of the Orangezicht Estate brought a deadlock in the council<sup>(161)</sup> between reformists and anti-reformists. In addition to its cost, it would require an Act of Parliament, as the land was entailed.<sup>(162)</sup> Ultimately the dispute was to go before parliament, where, after drawn out investigation and litigation, the entailment was removed, making its water accessible for the Molteno reservoir. Yet the debacle surrounding the Orangezicht reservoir had only started, and was to lead to resistance by ratepayers to the council's inept handling of the town's affairs, although growing disillusionment had long been reflected in the miniscule polls at elections.

A further major cause of public dissatisfaction was the discovery that the construction costs had been underestimated by a massive 50%.<sup>(163)</sup> Even more startling had been the admission made by the Town Engineer that it was not known how the reservoir would be filled,<sup>(164)</sup> as well as the suggestion that the municipality

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(159) A.15-1879, p.8.

(160) *ibid.*, Appendix B6. The petition of Councillors P.J. Stigant and D.C. De Waal, who argued that the price of the Estate was out of proportion to its value, and would represent an extreme burden on ratepayers. ( The municipal valuation was £4 800)

(161) 3/CT 1/1/1/30, Cape Town Municipal Record Books, Council Minutes, 29 January 1879. Councillors voting against the purchase: Bam; Stigant; Hofmeyer; Pentz; Ashley. Those voting in favour of the purchase: Piton; Juritz; Townsend; Louw; and the mayor Kotzee with a casting vote.

(162) A.15-1879, *op.cit.*, Appendix A.

(163) Cape Times, 19 February 1880.

(164) *ibid.*

start "casting about for some new source of supply".<sup>(165)</sup>

Apart from revealing the unprofessional manner in which the municipality was run, the real significance of the Orangetzicht dispute was that it crystallised the formation of two distinct rival parties within the council by the late 1870's, representing reformists and the anti-reformists, or the Clean Party and the Dirty Party as they were labeled by the press.<sup>(166)</sup>

Although the problem of water supply as well as related issues such as sanitation and disease were the underlying cause of the emerging conflict in with the Town House during the 1870's and 1880's, this must be seen within the context of the broader social and political changes taking place within Cape Town at this time. During this period, as had been the case twenty years earlier, the campaign for municipal reform centered around the interrelated issues of the town's water supply and sanitation. While in the 1850's reformers had attempted only to remove the municipality's control over water supply, by the 1880's reformers were to attempt to gain control over the municipality itself. Although there are many similarities with the attempt to reform the municipality in the 1850's, the growth in the power of the town's commercial classes by the 1880's was to place them in a position, if not by necessity, to exert political control over the Town House.

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(165) Cape Times, 19 February 1880.

(166) The 'clean' and 'dirty' party divisions were first described in the 1850's. The connection between these groupings in the 1850's and 1880's is consistent. The 'dirty party' was largely representative of the anti-reformists, who were substantial property owners and mainly Dutch speaking, while the 'clean party' represented the reformists, who were drawn from the commercial classes. For further background of municipal politics in the 1880's see V. Bickford-Smith, "Commerce, Class and Ethnicity in Cape Town, 1875-1902", unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of Cambridge, 1988, pp.129-144, and E.B. van Heyningen, "Public Health and Society in Cape Town 1880-1910", op.cit., p.120.

While a handful of reform-minded councilors like Lewis had succeeded in being elected during the 1870's, the majority of town councillors were still representative of Cape Town's older property owning families. In contrast, the supporters of reform, tended to be drawn from the ranks of the town's leading retailers, professional classes and civil servants. Although the reformists' call for water and sanitation reforms was grounded in concerns over health and trade, the philanthropic attitude over the effect on the town's underclass which had been so apparent in the 1850's, was almost entirely absent by the 1870's and 1880's. Indeed, the underclass, which in effect meant the majority of Cape Town's people of colour, were now seen as a major obstacle to reform, as it was perceived that it was they who underpinned rentier class control of the Town House. The issue of race and class thus became important factors in the battle for control over the Town House for the implementation of water and sanitation reforms necessary for sustained economic growth.

The reasons given for the failure of the commercial classes to gain influence over the Town House were examined in reports in the English-language newspapers throughout the 1870's. The Cape Times for example, provides us not only with an insight into this problem, but, perhaps more important, a window into the mind of reformers themselves.

The Cape Times had identified several reasons for the lack of progress in the development the town's water supply and sanitation. The first of these related to the apathy of ratepayers. It asked its readers:

"...how many ratepayers took the trouble to record their votes on that occasion? [1876 municipal elections] In one district...one candidate polled 9 votes, and three others seven-a-piece...municipal affairs must be in a very bad state indeed when ratepayers are so utterly hopeless that they will neither induce intelligent and liberal men to contest the election nor raise a finger in support of one, rather than of the other incapacabilities who have some reason for accepting candidature..."(167)

In further articles the Cape Times identified Cape Town's municipal system which made it necessary for ratepayer consent for improvement schemes requiring municipal borrowing, and restrictive legislation which prevented the raising of adequate finance, as a major reason for the town's condition. It complained:

"There is no systematic plan agreed upon to deal with the city as a whole, no funds provided for a general cure of patent and glaring defects. The fact that until the law is amended as Council's resources are so limited that they can undertake no important work without the express sanction of the ratepayers." (168)

Apart from voter apathy and a defective municipal ordinance, the Cape Times saw the greatest threat to reform being the symbiotic political relationship that existed between the representatives of property, the 'Dirty Party', and their working class tenants. The linkage of water supply with racial interests became a dominant theme in the call for water and sanitation reform. It was suggested that while landlords did not want to augment water supply because of the impact it would have on property rates, the coloured working class did not need it. The Cape Times inquired rhetorically:

"How moderate must be the requirements of Abdol, whose washings are chiefly of a ceremonial kind, and whose house is guiltless of the trace of the scrubbing brush. There are thousands of inhabitants in this city who could put up, without any sense of discomfort or want, with considerably less quantity of water than the present supply, and we may be sure that their voices will be heard...why should they be taxed for a commodity which they have never felt the need, and which they would not...use more freely than the present time?" (169)

During the annual elections to the town council, the Cape Times took every opportunity to draw the connection between the interests of the large property owners and the working class tenants, constantly accusing the former of intimidation, deceit and corruption. In the 1880 elections the Cape Times accused

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(168) Cape Times, 12 August 1878.

(169) Cape Times, 29 September 1876.



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the 'Dirty Party' of being the source of rumours that were:

"industriously being circulated that reform and taxation go hand in hand, and that a sweetened city involves a shilling rate..." (170)

Furthermore, the Cape Times had called upon "those who resent the degrading position of holding their comfort, health, and very lives at the will of the Malay element, to agitate for bold reform". (171) The Cape Times attack on the representatives of the Dirty Party similarly contained 'ethnic' or sectionalist overtones; it complained that:

"The idea of a reforming council has been derided, with vulgar ridicule by the meaner sort of existing councillors in strong and uncouth dialects...." (172)

The focus of the attack on Cape Muslims and to a lesser extent those of Dutch descent, represents what Bickford-Smith describes as "English ethnic mobilisation, which grew by distinguishing itself from the 'otherness' in the rest of Cape Town's population". (173) This in turn was fuelled by the perception of a link between the "Malay" community and regular outbreaks of disease and epidemics such as smallpox. (174) Thus Bickford-Smith argues that "Malays" "became stereotyped as 'Dirty' and obstructionist", (175) while "sanitation rhetoric became inextricably mixed with the rhetoric of British Imperialism in the ideology of Englishness". (176) The dirty party's apparent unwillingness to address issues such as the augmentation of water supply and sanitation reforms was seen as further evidence of an alliance of interests between the representatives of the large property owners and their tenants who kept them in power. For

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(170) Cape Times, 10 August, 1880.

(171) Cape Times, 21 September 1876.

(172) Cape Times, 10 August 1880.

(173) V. Bickford-Smith, "Commerce, Class and Ethnicity", p.161.

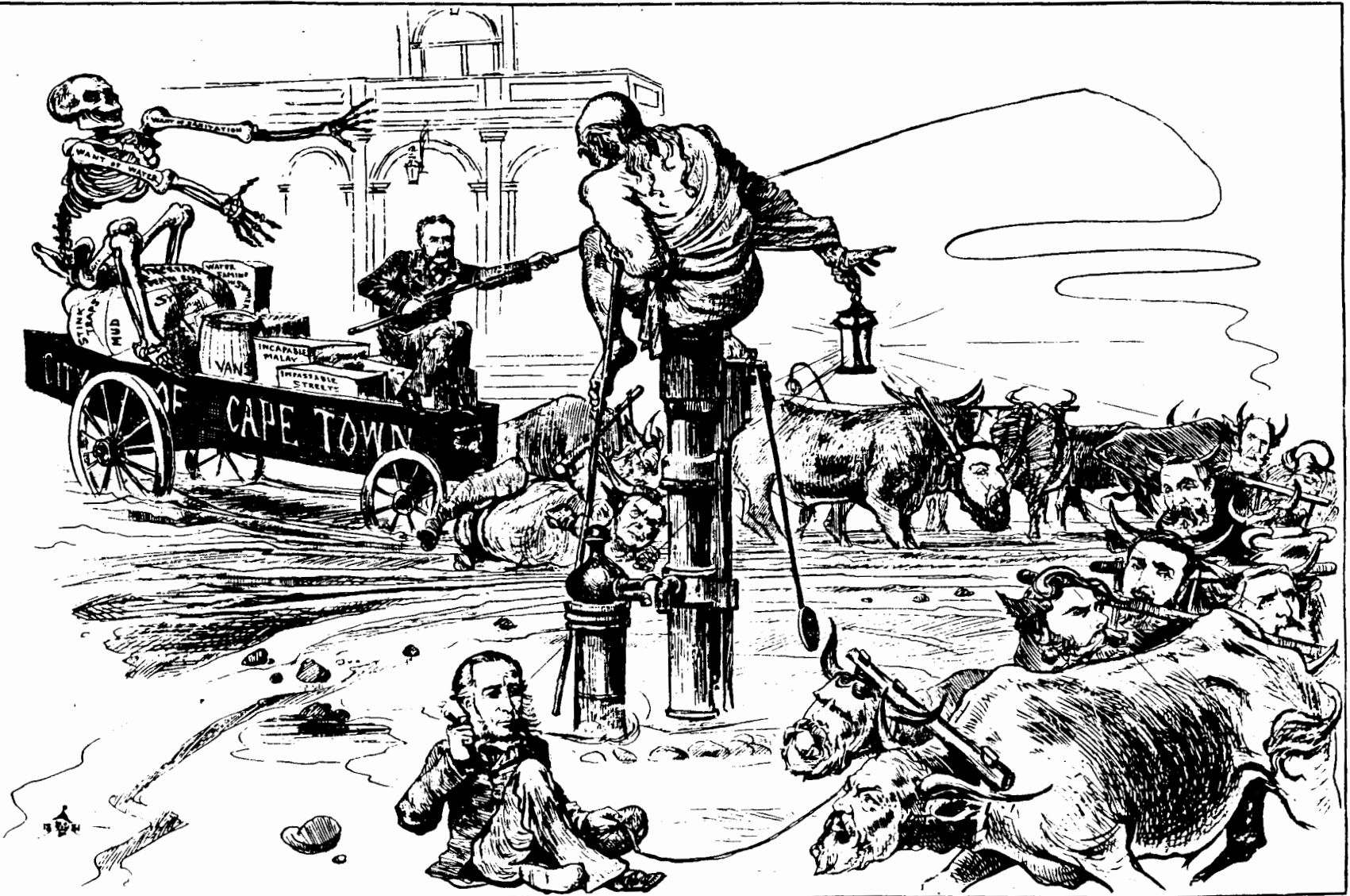
(174) E.B. van Heyningen, "Public Health and Society", pp.151-160.

(175) V. Bickford-Smith, "Commerce, Class and Ethnicity", p.123.

(176) *ibid.*, p.124.

CARTOON ONE

THE LANTERN 30 JULY 1881



the English-speaking elite, gaining control over the municipality meant "removing the control of property owners over the Town Council " which "went hand in hand ...with ending foreign, un-English, if not anti-British control." (177) The perception of the Town Council as un-English, at least in its attitude, is reinforced by a cartoon appearing in the Lantern, (178) which portrays it in terms of a Dutch ox-wagon unable to come to terms with effective municipal government. (see cartoon 1 opposite) The two main issues, sanitation and water supply are symbolised by the coffin and water pump.

The dirty party's dominance of the Town House was viewed with a degree of despondency by reformers, as the existing municipal system was perceived to entrench their interests. The dirty party's political power was not however based on a mass turnout of working class supporters, but rather on the besieging of the Town House during elections, as depicted in a Lantern cartoon of 1880, (179) in a scene resembling the British hustings. (see cartoon overleaf) This not only acted as a deterrent to middle class ratepayers, but also confirmed the perception of municipal politics as undignified. Low polls at municipal elections were a reflection not only of ratepayer's apathy and disillusionment with municipal politics, but also of their perception of it as a demeaning exercise.

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(177) V.Bickford-Smith, "Commerce Class and Ethnicity", p.124.

(178) The Lantern, 30 July 1881.

(179) The Lantern, 9 August 1880. While the Lantern cartoon is a caricature of events, it echoes similar perceptions, particularly in reports in the Cape Times. The degree to which reports and experiences acted as a deterrent to middle class voters is uncertain. At the very least it must have reinforced the general perception of Municipal politics as being something demeaning or distasteful. The amendments to the municipal ordinance in 1882, which abolished the system of a single polling station at the Town House, to allow polling stations in each district, were a result of these fears.



THE LANTERN 9 AUGUST 1880: MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

CARTOON TWO

By the beginning of the 1880's reformers and their press despaired of gaining control over the Town House, but this was soon to change. By the summer of 1881, water shortages reached a critical level with water supply for shipping being threatened, while water for brickmaking, building and woolwashing was stopped entirely.<sup>(180)</sup> The Cape Times reported in sensational detail the effects of the diminishing water supply claiming that "occasions have been known when not one bucketful could be obtained to prepare a corpse for burial".<sup>(181)</sup> Attempts by reformers to confront the council met with failure, and a public meeting organised by 'respectable citizen's' to protest against the water crisis had been overwhelmed by the supporters of the dirty party. The Cape Times complained bitterly that:

"under the guidance of one of the pugnacious councillors, the unwashed inhabitants were successful in crying down a modest taxing measure for the more adequate supply to the town..."<sup>(182)</sup>

It went on to suggest that:

"The public meeting did not represent the intelligence or property of the city, but it may never the less represented the preponderance of the voting power,...the moment the appeal is made to the mob outside, obstructiveness asserts its sway, and the reformers might as well go whistle to the wind as endeavour to persuade the unwashed rabble that it can conduce to their moral and physical well being to have copious water, sweet air, and comely streets..."<sup>(183)</sup>

Yet despite the perception of the control wielded by the Dirty Party, a number of reformers had been elected onto the council in 1880, including prominent merchants and businessmen such as

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(180) 3/CT 1/4/4/4/8/1, Appendix A, p.5.

(181) Cape Times, 28 January 1881.

(182) Cape Times, 11 March 1881.

(183) *ibid.*

W.Fleming, A.R. McKenzie, W.Farmer; H.Bolus and J.L. Brown.<sup>(184)</sup> Indeed it was realised by reformers within the town council that the 'Dirty Party' would remain entrenched in the Town House for as long as the existing political system remained. Consequently the reformers turned their attention to the municipality itself, to weaken the 'dirty party', as a prelude to far reaching social and economic reforms.

Outside the municipality, efforts to augment Cape Town's water supply focused on a report made by John Gamble, the Hydraulic Engineer for the Cape Colony who had been commissioned by the Waterworks Committee in 1880 to investigate various sources available to the town.<sup>(185)</sup> Gamble's report, issued in 1881, recommended the top of Table Mountain for the best and nearest source for a long term water supply.<sup>(186)</sup> This report was not favourably received by the council, which pinned its hopes on the uncompleted Molteno Reservoir. Reformers saw Gamble's Table Mountain proposal as a viable basis for the establishment of an independent water board as had been proposed in the 1850's. Another proposal was that a private water company be established to develop Table Mountain's water resources to supply the entire Cape Peninsula, including the villages which were dependant on well water. Many of the town's businessmen, were aware that water companies and water boards were an accepted part of

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(184) V.Bickford-Smith, "Commerce, Class and Ethnicity in Cape Town", op.cit., pp.129-130; and V.Bickford-Smith, "'Keeping Your Own Council': The struggle between houseowners and merchants for control of the Cape Town Municipal Council in the last two decades of the nineteenth century", in Studies in the History of Cape Town, Volume 5, C.Saunders et.al. (eds.), Cape Town, 1984, p.199. W.Fleming and A.R. McKenzie were prominent merchants, the latter a chief landing agent at the docks. W. Farmer was a merchant and investor in the City Steam Laundry, in which he had a partnership with H. Bolus, a stockbroker. J.L. Brown was a director and chairman of the Equitable Fire Assurance and Trust Company. It is perhaps no coincidence that all these men had a direct or passing concern, through there business interests, for the augmentation of Cape Town's water supply.

(185) 3/CT 1/4/4/4/8/1, Appendix A, p.5.

(186) *ibid.*

municipal government and some South African towns, such as Kimberley and Port Elizabeth were successfully served by them. (187)

Disappointed at the results of the attempts to reform the municipality from within, the Cape Times now campaigned to divest the council of its control over water supply. (188) It made the appeal:

"The duty now lies with the leading citizens, upon men who hold a large stake in the city, and perceive the urgency of the situation, to meet together and concert plans for a water scheme over which the Town Council shall have no powers what so ever. Private enterprise may be awakened in the matter, the concessions necessary being secured by Act of Parliament..." (189)

It warned that:

"We cannot...command capitalists to come to our rescue,...A water scheme for Cape Town and its suburbs would involve an outlay of a quarter of a million sterling. For reasonable concessions men would be found to without difficulty to undertake this expenditure, and,...with the certainty of securing a handsome profit to themselves on terms advantageous to the ratepayers." (190)

Alternatively it was argued, if private water companies could not be attracted, water supply could be managed by an independent board with greater powers capable of developing a scheme for the city and suburbs "of larger dimensions and a wider scope than a town council could legitimately entertain." (191)

The appeals made by the Cape Times did not go unheeded. In 1882 two leading reformers and businessmen represented on the town council and in parliament, William Fleming and William Farmer,

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(187) B.Roberts, Civic Century. The first one hundred years of the Kimberley municipality, 1978, p.25.

(188) see Cape Times , Leading articles for 14 February; 11 March; 18 March; 25 March 1881.

(189) Cape Times, 11 March 1881.

(190) Cape Times, 14 February 1881.

(191) Cape Times, 18 March 1881.

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and several others, '192' joined together as provisional directors of the Table Mountain Water Supply Company, with the intention to raise capital for a company to supply Cape Town and the suburbs with water. '193' Although Parliament enacted a bill giving the company a concession to use water from the Table Mountain catchment area, '194' the venture failed to get off the ground due to widespread opposition to the company's proposal to impose a water rate on householders. '195' While Cape Town rejected the concept of a water company, these were to flourish at a later period with the emergence of the suburban municipal authorities.

While reformist businessmen made little headway in establishing a water company, an opportunity for reforming the municipality arose after the 1880 election, which saw the representatives of the Clean Party climb to six out of the eighteen town councillors. '196' Soon after the election, a number of reform-minded councillors were appointed onto a special committee which was formed to examine various Municipal Acts and their amendments with the object of reporting any improvements that may be desirable. '197' This provided the reformers with an opportunity to address the structural imbalances within the municipality that determined the predominance of the dirty party, and its obstruction of improvements to the town's water supply and sanitation system.

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(192) A.25-1882, Cape of Good Hope (Colony), Report of select committee appointed to consider and report on the Table Mountain Water Supply Bill, p.1. Apart from W.Farmer (M.L.A.), others amongst the provisional directors included A. Ebden (M.L.C), L.Wiener (a leading member of the Cape Town Chamber of Commerce), and other businessmen; J.Mudie; W.G. Anderson and W.W. Dickson.

(193) *ibid.*, p.1.

(194) Act 47 of 1882.

(195) A.9-1887, Cape of Good Hope (Colony) Report of the select committee on Wynberg and Cape Town Water Supply Bills, p.46.

(196) see footnote (184)

(197) V.Bickford-Smith, "Keeping Your Own Council", p.196.



Amongst the recommendations made by the committee was the modification of a clause in the 1861 Municipal Act which determined that the municipality supply a minimum of 50 gallons of water daily to each dwelling house free of charge.<sup>(198)</sup> It will be remembered that this had been a concession won by Solomon in the conflict between the reformers and the dirty party twenty years earlier. Its intention had been to alleviate the suffering of the poor by forcing the municipality to augment water supplies, but this had never been achieved.<sup>(199)</sup> While this measure had been vigorously opposed by the dirty party in the 1850's, reformers now saw the free water clause as a drain on municipal resources and an obstacle to making the waterworks self financing,<sup>(200)</sup> and thus sought to charge property owners for all water supply. Ironically, large property owners and their representatives were to fight for the retention of the clause, as it had only been partly observed, to the benefit of landlords, while the working classes benefited least of all.<sup>(201)</sup>

Apart from the proposed changes to the water clause, the report of the special committee issued in early 1881, contained other recommendations clearly aimed at weakening the Dirty Party's domination of the Town House. One of the most important of these was the recommendation that voting at municipal elections no longer be carried out exclusively at the Town House but that separate polling booths be established in each of the town's six

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(198) Act 1 of 1861, Clause 15.

(199) A13-1881, Cape of Good Hope (Colony), Report of the select committee appointed to consider and report on the Cape Town Municipal Bill, p.60. Only about half of Cape Town's households were supplied by water leadings.

(200) Under Act 1 of 1861, the municipality was not allowed to make a profit out of water rates and expenditure was to balance revenue.

(201) A.13-1881, p.60. As only one charge was made for a connection to the water mains, landlords owning rows of hirehouses could benefit from the free water clause for each household while only making a single payment.

districts<sup>(202)</sup> to encourage the participation of middle class ratepayers in municipal elections.

A further recommendation of the special committee was that the municipality's borrowing powers be raised from £20 000 to £150 000,<sup>(203)</sup> and for an increase in the municipal rate.<sup>(204)</sup> Not surprisingly the final report were opposed by the full council, which attempted to suppress its more controversial aspects.<sup>(205)</sup> However, with public support, reformers were able to bring these amendments in the form of a draft bill before a parliamentary select committee.<sup>(206)</sup>

As was to be expected, these recommendations were strenuously opposed by the dirty party and the town's large property owners. In the evidence given before the parliamentary select committee it is apparent that the rentier classes rejected the concept that the municipality should be obliged to supply water to individual houses. Thus, R.H. Arderne, who owned '15 or 16 small houses' <sup>(207)</sup> objected because:

"I believe the cause of a great source of nuisance to Cape Town is the free supply of water to every little hut and hovel. I believe dry dirt is comparatively innocuous, and I believe it is the waste of water in all these little lanes and alleys that has been a source of more annoyance and nuisance than anything else could possibly be. When these people had to go to the pumps they did not waste the water."<sup>(208)</sup>

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(202) V.Bickford-Smith, "Keeping Your Own Council", p.197.

(203) A.13-1881, pp104-105, Appendix I clause 7.

(204) *ibid.*, Appendix I clause 6

(205) V.Bickford-Smith, "Keeping Your Own Council", p.197.

(206) A13-1881, Cape of Good Hope (Colony), Report of the select committee appointed to consider and report on the Cape Town Municipal Bill.

(207) *ibid.*, p.69.

(208) *ibid.*, p.68.

Another large property owner, L.P.Cauvin warned that if every dwelling had to pay for a minimum of 10 gallons a day "a landlord may have to pay more than he gets for the rent of his house".<sup>(209)</sup> One dirty party member of the town council, G.A. Ashley, who owned 11 houses,<sup>(210)</sup> complained the new regulation would cost him £9 a year for each house.<sup>(211)</sup>

Despite these objections, the select committee approved the proposed amendments to the municipal ordinance, and parliament went on to pass the Cape Town Municipal Bill in 1882.<sup>(212)</sup> The dirty party's defeat demonstrates the declining influence of the the old landed and mercantile families upon both the local and colonial government. Whereas in the 1850's and 1860's, these interests had been protected by their political allies in the Legislative Council,<sup>(213)</sup> since 1872, when the Cape had been granted responsible government, parliament increasingly came to reflect the concerns of the industrial and mining capital and the expansion of British domination in Southern Africa. The old dirty Cape Town which had been tolerated by the authorities was now rapidly becoming incompatible with the its development as the colony's political and economic capital. The outbreak of a smallpox epidemic in January 1882 drew attention to the inadequacies of Cape Town's local government, and from the 1880's onwards the central government became increasing responsive to

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(209) A.13-1881, p.68.

(210) V.Bickford-Smith, "Keeping Your Own Council", p.198.

(211) A.13-1881, p.50.

(212) Act 44 of 1882.

(213) J.D. Omer-Cooper, History of Southern Africa, 1987, p.92. Also S.Trapido, "The Origins of the Cape franchise qualifications of 1853", in Journal of African History, Volume 5, no.1, (1964), pp.37-54. The high economic franchise would have disqualified a large number of the coloured and Dutch speaking population, leaving government dominated by English-speaking merchants. Dutch speakers thus joined a strange alliance with humanitarian and progressive groups.

LANTERN, JULY 1, 1882.



HORRIDA MORS.

the need for reform through its support of amendments to the municipal ordinance. (214)

The outbreak of the smallpox epidemic in 1882 brought the issue of reform to the forefront. The gravity of the situation was reflected in a cartoon, 'Horrida Mors', which appeared in the Lantern of July 1882. The grim reaper representing smallpox, typhoid and cholera visits Cape Town in response to the Dirty Party's failure to attend to the sanitation crisis. (see cartoon 3 opposite) As a consequence of this, and with the aid of the amended municipal ordinance, the elections of August 1882 (see cartoon page 82) saw the clean party finally defeat the dirty party by gaining control over ten of the town council's eighteen seats. (215)

Barely two weeks after the victory of the clean party was struck by a disaster, with the bursting of the Molteno Reservoir, which had only been completed in the previous year. (216) Although parts of the town were flooded, no lives were lost, but it did

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(214) E.B. van Heyningen, "Public Health and Society in Cape Town 1880-1910", op.cit., pp.234-35. Van Heyningen argues that before the 1880's there was little initiative for reform from central government. Parliament was more concerned with the interests of the farming sector. The kind of social legislation being enacted in Britain had made virtually no impact on the Cape. Changes from the 1880's are seen to be due to the influx of immigrants and the knowledge they brought with them. But improvements still continued to be haphazard and responsive to crisis and public demand.

(215) Cape Times, 15 August 1882. The Cape Times broke down the new council into the following categories:

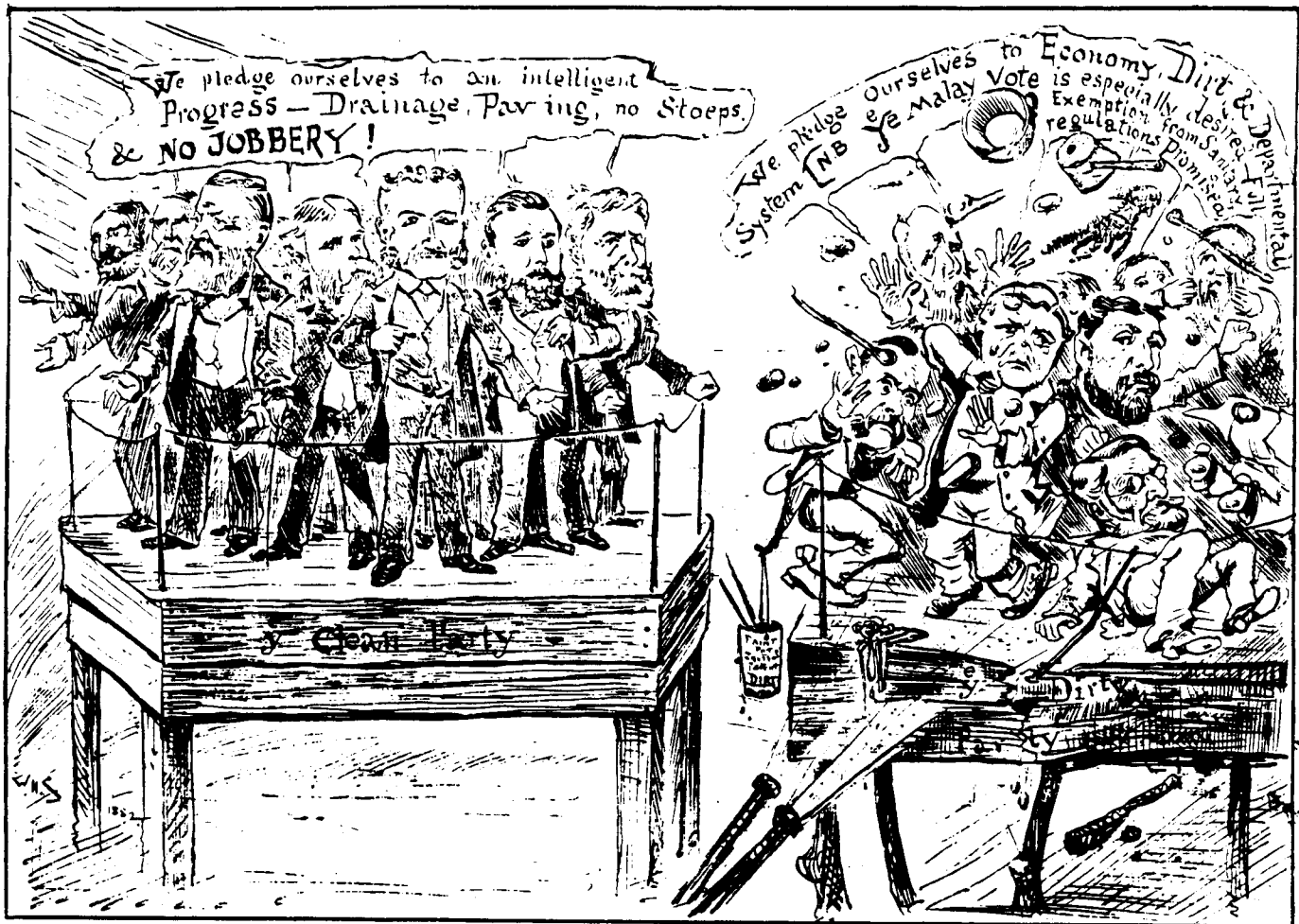
<u>Clean</u>	<u>Dirty</u>	<u>Neutral</u>
Fleming	Ashley	O'Reilly
Woodhead	Hofmeyer(JC)	Stigant
Lewis	White	Tennant
Farmer	Louw	Myburgh
Maxwell	Graaff	
Miller	Hofmeyer	
Smart		
Brown		

Graaff and Stigant began to identify more closely with the clean party after the election.

(216) J.Lison, "A short tragic history of the Molteno reservoir", Cabo, Volume 2, no.1, 1978.

CARTOON 4

LANTERN, AUGUST 5, 1882.



THE TWO PLATFORMS.

mean a further prolongation of the water crisis. In a sense the bursting of the Molteno Reservoir symbolised the end of an era in Cape Town's municipal government. The long controversy surrounding the construction of the Table Valley reservoirs epitomised the amateurism and inefficiency of the municipality. It also underlined the futility of its parsimonious and short sighted attempt to squeeze every drop from the Table Mountain springs, instead of investing in long term sources of water supply beyond Table Valley. With the repair of the Molteno reservoir estimated to cost an additional £20 000, the Cape Times warned the new "clean" council that it would be "inexcusable if they undertake the expenditure of money on public works except on the advice of men of approved professional knowledge and experience".<sup>(217)</sup> Indeed, 1882 marks the beginning of the establishment of professional local government, which, in time was prove its capability in resolving Cape Town's endemic sanitation and water problems.

The 1882 Municipal Act represents not only a turning point in Cape Town's municipal history, but is also the elimination of a process that had its roots in the 1859 conflict between the reformers and the rentier classes. As in the 1850's, critical water shortages pre-empted a political struggle over the role of the municipality. In the 1850's, when reformers were far less influential, their attempt to reform the municipality was directed at subverting its control over water supply. By the 1880's, the concept of establishing an independent water board or even a private water company was still considered a viable proposition by some businessmen as the town's water supply was considered too important to be left in the incapable hands of the municipality. Thus in the 1880's Cape Town had a choice between seeking reform to extend the municipality's power to enable it to undertake important improvements, or to divide its authority between independent boards and private companies who would take

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(217) Cape Times, 13 September 1882.

control of the water supply and other potentially profitable municipal services. Ironically, the future of Cape Town's government was being bought into question at a time when its British counterparts were moving towards the highest stages of municipal socialism. But with the acquiescence of the colonial government, reformers within the council were able to undermine the basis of the dirty party's power through the 1882 Municipal Act. With this accomplished, in the following decade the dominant merchant and business interest sought to marginalise the rentier class and the underclass within municipal politics, to ensure that there was no opposition to improvement.<sup>(218)</sup>

From the mid 1880's reformers within the town council sought to emulate the municipal governments of British towns and cities. The Victorian ideal characteristics of councillors, as identified by E.P.Hennock,<sup>(219)</sup> as men of respectability, wealth and education, were criteria which replaced the perception of and municipal government as demeaning and self serving. In reality, the Town House had been captured to serve new interests. As the Cape Times saw it:

"Municipal jobbery...and dirt...these two have gone hand in hand, a brace of unwholesome, unlovely twins, engendered of Cape Town slime, and nourished by the tainted atmosphere of the Town House. These excrescences, indeed, we would sweep away altogether, but not the municipal institutions which they deform and dishonour".<sup>(220)</sup>

Instead, it was believed that the town should be administered along the lines of business principles. It was an age in which the virtues of businessmen became the necessary qualifications of a town councillor.<sup>(221)</sup> Yet despite high expectations, the improvement of Cape Town, and particularly its water supply were far from being solved.

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(218) V.Bickford-Smith, "Keeping Your Own Council", pp.201-202.

(219) E.P. Hennock, Fit and Proper Persons. Ideal and Reality in Nineteenth Century Urban Government, (London), 1973, p.317.

(220) Cape Times, 18 March 1881.

(221) E.P. Hennock, Fit and Proper Persons, p.317.



## THE REFORMED MUNICIPALITY AND WATER SUPPLY: 1882-1900

Between 1882 and 1900 Cape Town finally turned its attention to the mountains of the Cape Peninsula for a long term solution to its water problem. Despite the reformers intention of addressing the issue of sanitation and water supply, little real progress was made until the 1890's. The underlying cause for this delay may be ascribed to the fact that the economic boom that Cape Town had been experiencing since 1875, came to a sudden end in 1882,<sup>(222)</sup> coinciding with the ascendancy of the clean party.<sup>(223)</sup> It has been argued by Bickford-Smith that the Clean Party of 1882 was supplanted by a more coherent and determined Clean Party in the 1890's.<sup>(224)</sup> This group, it is suggested, had at its nucleus a new generation of businessmen who were attuned to the rapidly changing commercial and technological environment, and who gradually replaced the old merchant classes, who were weakened by the economic depression.<sup>(225)</sup> Another development was that the reformers, who were largely of British origin, were joined by a "new group of politically influential and economically ambitious town Afrikaaners",<sup>(226)</sup> which included men such as D.P. Graaff and D.C. De Waal.<sup>(227)</sup> This mirrored the broader political realignments that had taken place in the Cape

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(222) V.Bickford-Smith, "Commerce, Class and Ethnicity", p.25.

(223) *ibid.*, p.141.

(224) V.Bickford-Smith, "Cape Town's Dominant Class and the Search for Order", Paper presented to the Western Cape Roots and Realities Conference, University of Cape Town, 1986, p.10.

(225) *ibid.*, pp.9-10. It is argued that a business revolution took place which was underpinned by technologies of improved transportation and communication; of which the new class of businessmen used to their advantage.

(226) *ibid.*, p.11. The words of J.X. Merriman.

(227) D.P. Graaff and D.C. De Waal were both prominent merchants and members of the Legislative Assembly. Included amongst the English-speaking 'cleans' in the 1890's were: J. Garlick (retailer and importer); J. Attwell (merchant); A.R. McKenzie (shipping and landing agent); G. Smart (builder); E.B. Fuller (physician and MLA, later MOH medical officer for Cape Town); W. Hay (MLA) and F.Y. St Leger (Proprietor of the Cape Times).

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Parliament. It was this new Clean Party of the 1890's, Bickford-Smith argues, that used local government to effect a material transformation of Cape Town in line with its commercial values. (228)

The failure of the old Clean Party to address the water problem cannot be blamed on the economic depression alone. Indeed the period between 1882 and the early 1890's represents a period in which the way was prepared for the municipality to undertake reform. In addition to this, at about the time that Cape Town's attention had turned to developing Table Mountain's water supply, newly established municipalities in the Peninsula had also begun to consider this as a source for their needs. Thus, during the 1880's, much of the city's energy was directed at establishing control over the Table Mountain watershed and excluding the suburbs from this source.

Having gained control of the Town House in the 1880's, the reformers' first priority was to secure their position. Thus in addition to seeking to extend the city's control over Cape Peninsula's water resources, much attention was given to improving the municipality's functioning, particularly areas which were seen as obstacles to further municipal reform and which prevented its undertaking of improvements. In this regard during the 1880's and early 1890's the reformers sought to increase municipal borrowing powers as well to narrow the municipal franchise by excluding the working class, which was perceived as hostile to reform.

A series of three municipal amendment acts passed in 1885, 1890 and 1893 restricted the municipal franchise by narrowing the

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(228) V. Bickford-Smith, "Cape Town's Dominant Class and the Search for Order", p.9-10.

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definition of occupiers who were liable for rates,<sup>(229)</sup> by raising the property qualification for the franchise,<sup>(230)</sup> and by introducing a system of plural voting designed to favour businessmen and property owners.<sup>(231)</sup> Similarly, municipal borrowing powers which had been increased from £20 000 to £150 000 in 1882, were raised to £662 000 in 1893<sup>(232)</sup> and again to £719 000 in 1894.<sup>(233)</sup> While these amendments to the municipal ordinance were to provide a solid basis for the Council to undertake substantial improvements, the provision making it necessary for the consent of ratepayers to approve municipal loans, remained an anomaly, and was used in the 1890's and beyond as a device to constrain overzealous reformers. While conflicting interests over augmenting water supply was soon to emerge again, for the remainder of the 1880's Cape Town's attention was directed towards the developments taking place in the suburban municipalities.

Cape Town had at first welcomed the establishment of village management boards in Rondebosch, Wynberg, Claremont and Mowbray between 1881 and 1882.<sup>(234)</sup> In comparison to Cape Town the

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- (229) Act 28 of 1885. For franchise purposes the term 'occupier' was limited to those liable for the tenant's rate.
- (230) Act 26 of 1890. (Clause 5) The occupier or tenants property had to exceed £100 to qualify for the municipal vote. Bickford-Smith has estimated that this effectively disenfranchised about 20% of ratepayers.
- (231) Act 24 of 1893. Those owning property valued between £500 and £999 qualified for two votes, while owners of property with a value of more than £1000 qualified for a maximum of 3 votes. Merchants who owned property in the city but lived in the suburbs, possessed up to 3 votes, while the working classes living in Cape Town often had no vote at all.
- (232) Act 24 of 1893.
- (233) Act 9 of 1894.
- (234) In the period 1881-1882, Claremont, Mowbray, Rondebosch and Wynberg had all acquired village management boards. These formed a single municipality, the Liesbeeck Municipality, which was created by government proclamation 97 of 1883. Under proclamation 115 of 1886, this was altered to create Wynberg Municipality. The remaining wards of the old Liesbeeck authority also became independent municipalities, with the former Mowbray Management Board being incorporated into the Municipality of Rondebosch until 1990, when it too became a separate municipality.

suburban villages had no reservoirs or piped water, and were entirely dependent on wells and springs.<sup>(235)</sup> Even the older established Woodstock Municipality had no water resources and was almost entirely dependant on Cape Town.<sup>(236)</sup> During their formative period these authorities posed no threat to Cape Town's ambitions in the Peninsula as they had no ability to address their sanitation and water problems by themselves due to their limited financial power. Even the Cape Times took upon itself the task of warning these management boards to avoid the pitfalls that Cape Town's reformers had encountered:

"The suburbs, though having a comparatively large proportion of wealthy and intelligent inhabitants, abound at the time in residents of the dirtier sort, and, unless these folks are restrained in time, foul conditions will...become hard to cope with as they are in Cape Town".<sup>(237)</sup>

The establishment of the Liesbeek Municipality in 1884, comprising the four former management boards, was to lead to the first suburban attempt at developing an independent water supply. This was however destined to failure, as the ratable income of the fledgling municipality amounted to only £4 777 per annum, compared to Cape Town's income of £60 091,<sup>(238)</sup> which was insufficient for the suburbs to finance a viable project.<sup>(239)</sup>

Nevertheless, in 1886 the Liesbeek Municipality approached Parliament with the intention of taking over the water rights of

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(235) A.9-1888, Cape of Good Hope (Colony), Report of the select committee on Cape Town sanitation, p.25.

(236) *ibid.*, pp.50-53.

(237) Cape Times, 14 September 1882.

(238) A.10-1886, Cape of Good Hope (Colony), Report of the select committee on the Liesbeeck Municipality Water Supply Bill, p.24.

(239) Cape of Good Hope (Colony), House of Assembly Debates, (Hansard) 8 June 1886, p.376. Mr. Gamble, the Hydraulic Engineer had admitted to A.Ebden (MLA) that the Table Mountain scheme was too big for any municipality to undertake.

the stillborn Table Mountain Water Supply Company. Unexpectedly, the proposed Liesbeek Municipality Water Supply Bill was opposed for financial reasons by a handful of its own representatives from the Rondebosch and Newlands wards, who objected to paying for a water scheme, when these areas were adequately supplied with water from the Albion and Kommetjie Springs.<sup>(240)</sup> This conflict was the direct cause of the disintegration of the Liesbeek authority later in the same year, leading to the formation of four separate municipalities; Rondebosch, Claremont, Wynberg, and later Mowbray. The breakup of the Liesbeek authority did not leave the way open for Cape Town to assert its authority over the Table Mountain catchment areas, for the newly established Wynberg municipality was itself to attempt to take over the abandoned water bill of the Table Mountain Water Supply Company.<sup>(241)</sup>

Wynberg's objective, once it had gained control over the water rights of Table Mountain catchment area, was to develop a water scheme which it hoped to finance by selling water to the suburbs. This came as a shock to Cape Town, which responded swiftly by producing a private bill of its own in which it laid claim to all the water rights of Table Mountain.<sup>(242)</sup> As Parliament was confronted with two rival water bills, the matter was referred to a select committee for arbitration.

The Wynberg and Cape Town Water Supply Bills represent an important stage in the history of the Cape Peninsula's water supply, as the outcome of this conflict was to determine the relationship between the city and the suburbs for the next quarter of a century. In effect, whoever controlled the Table

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(240) A.10-1886, p.4, p.24. Evidence of Councillors J.Wrench; Dr. J.M. Hiddings; A. Manson and H. Thompson.

(241) A.9-1887, pp.11-12.

(242) *ibid.*, p.18.

Mountain catchment would be given the capacity for the economic and political domination of the Peninsula. Water was not only a scarce and expensive resource, but also had the potential to become the source of substantial income for whichever municipality monopolised the Peninsula's water supply.

Cape Town's claim to this water outweighed those made by Wynberg, for, in addition to its own requirements, the city had the responsibility of supplying shipping, the railways, the Colonial Government and the municipality of Sea Point with water. For this reason Cape Town was granted control over almost the entire mountain. Parliament was also to award Wynberg Municipality a minor section of the catchment area sufficient for its own requirements,<sup>(243)</sup> which had the effect of isolating the municipality from an impending water crisis that was to have a serious impact on the rest of the suburbs.

As the Wynberg and Cape Town Water Supply Act cut off Rondebosch, Claremont, Mowbray and Woodstock Municipalities from the Table Mountain catchment area, these suburbs were to become dependent on the Albion and Kommetjie springs situated at Rondebosch and Newlands for most of their water supply. These springs were taken over by the Cape Town District Waterworks Company in 1889.<sup>(244)</sup> It was later to become the basis of the Suburban Municipal Water Board, which was to attempt to break the city's monopoly of the Peninsula's water supply in the 1900's.

The assertion of Cape Town's authority over most of the Peninsula's water supply was thus completed by the late 1880's,

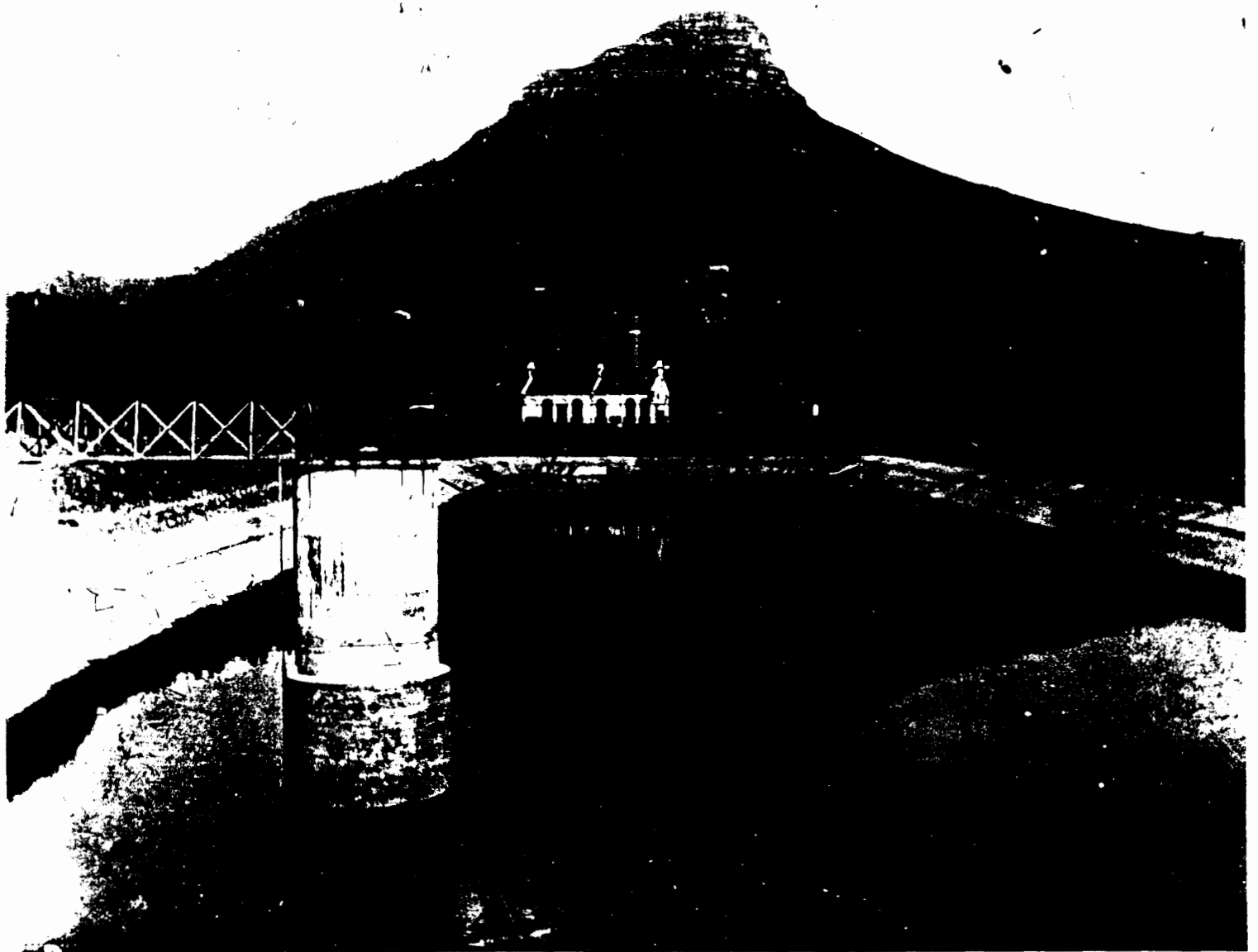
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(243) J.D. Linnegar, "From Village to Municipality, a history of Wynberg", BA Hons dissertation, University of Cape Town, 1975, pp.75-76.

(244) SMW 4/17, The Secretary Suburban Municipal Water Works Committee, p.3.

PHOTOGRAPH I

The Molteno Reservoir c.1900



Cape Archives: AG I3809

coinciding with a revival of the Cape's economy in 1889,<sup>(245)</sup> which at last placed the reformists in a position to address the question of augmenting the city's water supply.

The 1890's represent a decade of tremendous progress in the development of Cape Town's water supply, as well as in many other areas of municipal improvement such as the building of a drainage and sewerage system and the development of a electricity system.<sup>(246)</sup> The rapid progress made during this period was not without cost, for the upsurge in municipal expenditure; after decades of frugality, was to bring the city to the brink of a political and financial crisis. Schemes to exploit Table Mountain water resources, as well as plans to construct a main drainage system encountered numerous obstacles giving rise to massive expenditure over and above original estimates and resulting in resistance from ratepayers, which almost toppled the Clean Party's control of the Town House.

After the reconstruction of the Molteno reservoir had been completed in 1886, ( see photograph 1 opposite ) bringing its total cost to £111 135,<sup>(247)</sup> the council began to consider various ways of exploiting the Table Mountain catchment area. A severe drought in 1887, which resulted in ships being turned away from the harbour without water, provided a stimulus for the municipality to consider new ways of augmenting water supply. The driving force behind this was John Woodhead, one of the supporters of the Clean Party who had been elected to Council in 1882. Woodhead had a personal interest in the city's water

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(245) V.Bickford-Smith, "Class, Commerce and Ethnicity", p.25.

(246) see J.Carruthers, "G.H. Swingler and the Supply of Electricity to Cape Town", in Studies in the History of Cape Town, volume 5, C.Saunders et.al. eds., 1984, pp.208-231. For detail on the development of the sanitation system see E.B. van Heyningen, "Public Health and Society in Cape Town", pp.273-281.

(247) A.9-1887, Appendix O.



problems, because as the owner of an ironworks, the water crisis of the early 1880's had threatened to close his business. According to one report, it was as a result of this he entered Council and "devoted himself at once to water" (248) As a one time marine engineer, Woodhead soon became Chairman of the Waterworks Committee, and made a major contribution to the development of the Table Mountain water scheme, one of the largest projects of its kind at the time. (249) Indeed, the 1890's, which twice saw his mayoralty, was referred to as the "Woodhead era" by the contemporary press in recognition of his dedication to solving the problem of water supply.

The first project commenced under Woodhead was plagued by controversy. This involved the construction of a tunnel and pipeline from the upper reaches of the Disa stream to divert water into the Molteno reservoir. It was an ambitious project comprising 5 miles of pipeline as well as a 700 yard long tunnel through the mountain to the top of Slangolie Ravine, (see map 4 overleaf) at an estimated cost of £25 000. (250) Although the scheme's completion was expected to take no more than eighteen months, it took over three years and its final cost reached £40 000. (251) Furthermore, when the tunnel was finally opened in 1891, only a "mere trickle" was to flow into the Molteno reservoir as a result of a severe drought, (252) which brought the viability of the scheme into question. These fears proved unfounded as the first winter rains flowed through the Woodhead tunnel, as it was called, to fill the Molteno Reservoir to capacity.

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(248) Cape Times, 24 September 1896.

(249) *ibid.*

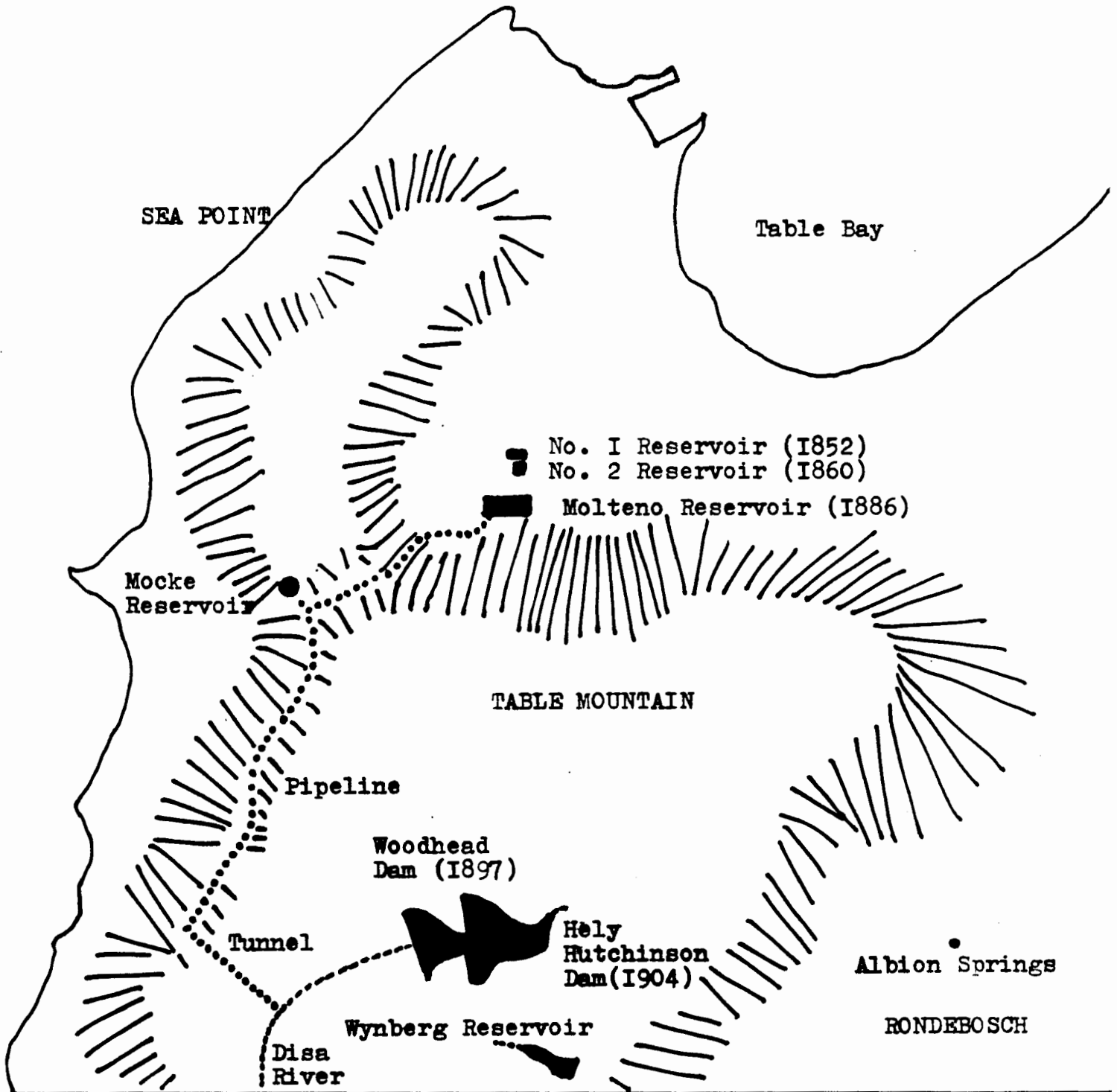
(250) 3/CT 1/4/4/4/8/1, Appendix A, p.6.

(251) Cape Times, 24 September 1896.

(252) *ibid.*

MAP 4

THE TABLE MOUNTAIN WATER SUPPLY SYSTEM 1890-1904



Yet even with the increased water supply brought by the Woodhead tunnel, it soon became apparent that a further catchment reservoir was needed in order to meet the growing need of the city. Thus by late 1891, the decision was made to construct a reservoir on the top of Table Mountain at an estimated cost of £50 000. The finance of this project, it was argued, would be borne by revenues received from the increased sales of water. It was hoped that the profits generated from the Waterworks through the water rate and water charges would go towards the relief of rates and subsidise non-renumerative works such as the drainage scheme.<sup>(253)</sup> What was not anticipated was the escalation in the rate of municipal expenditure on further projects, even before revenue could be produced from this source. For example, before the completion of the Woodhead reservoir, a further storage reservoir (The Mocke Reservoir) was built at Kloof Nek, as well as a small service reservoir at Sea Point at a combined cost of £4 360.<sup>(254)</sup> A further problem was the vast discrepancy between the estimated and actual costs of these projects. The decision to raise the wall of the Woodhead dam increased its cost from an estimated £50 000 to reach £156 000 on its completion in 1897.<sup>(255)</sup> Even before its completion, Thomas Stewart, the engineer who was responsible for its construction, suggested that the dam was not sufficient to meet the soaring demand for water, and recommended that the construction of a second catchment reservoir be considered.<sup>(256)</sup> (see map 4 opposite)

Apart from the large amounts of money that were spent on augmenting water supply, the municipality had also intended to invest a considerable sum on a drainage and sewerage scheme, for

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(253) Cape Times, 8 August 1896.

(254) 3/CT 1/4/4/4/6/1, Memoranda: Cape Town Water Works, Appendix B, p.12.

(255) 3/CT 1/4/4/4/8/1, Appendix A, p.6.

(256) Minute of the Mayor, 1897.

which ratepayers had sanctioned a loan for £162 000 in 1892.<sup>(257)</sup> An ongoing controversy developed over the main drainage scheme in the late 1880's equalling the issue of water supply, and was to contribute to growing dissatisfaction with the process of municipal reform.<sup>(258)</sup>

Despite the unprecedented expenditure on augmenting water supply ratepayers were exasperated to find that the city once again was to suffer from severe water shortages in 1894,<sup>(259)</sup> with no end in sight to municipal spending. By this time ratepayers had sanctioned loans for a total of £719 000 for various projects,<sup>(260)</sup> many of which exceeded the original estimates. Even the ever-loyal Cape Times had become impatient with the lack of progress and warned that another £500 000 would be needed to redeem old loans and to complete improvement schemes.<sup>(261)</sup> The Colonial Department of the London Stock Exchange had issued a warning regarding the redemption of municipal loans, and hinted at the possible removal of Cape Town from the official list of the Stock Exchange, which would effectively cut the city off from overseas finance.<sup>(262)</sup>

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(257) Cape Times, 25 January 1895.

(258) The first serious attempt to develop Cape Town's sanitation system began in 1888 with the issuing of the Pritchard report, which recommended a sewage outlet directly into the sea, in contrast to the council's plan for an intercepting sewer. This controversy culminated in the Dunscombe report which essentially confirmed the principles set out by Pritchard. Problems over the siting of the outlet and its finance resulted in the delay of the scheme until 1895. For detail see E.B. van Heyningen, "Public Health and Society in Cape Town 1880-1910", pp.267-281.

(259) Cape Times, 10 February; 16 February and 22 February 1895. The water shortages reached a critical point where the waterworks committee was considering entering into an agreement with the Suburban District Water Works Company. this was avoided with the timely arrival of rain.

(260) Cape Times, 15 August 1896. These included £162 000 for a main drainage scheme; £50 000 for a city hall; £60 000 for an electricity installation; £20 000 for public baths and a sea promenade; and £8 000 for a new fish market.

(261) Cape Times, 13 March 1894.

(262) *ibid.*

By the mid 1890's the municipality found itself with insufficient capital to proceed with the water and sanitation projects and a growing reluctance on the part of ratepayers to sanction further loans, or by the Cape Town's creditors to extend the city's finance, as payments on loans already consumed a third of the total annual municipal income.<sup>(263)</sup> The maximum property rate of 4d in the £ meant that the municipality could not directly increase revenue from this source without further alienating ratepayers. In 1896 the municipality attempted to increase rates indirectly by raising property valuations by an average 25%.<sup>(264)</sup> This was vehemently opposed by ratepayers who were now becoming alarmed at the extent of the municipality's indebtedness. As the Town Council could not substantially increase its income from municipal sources it was forced to seek another loan in order to complete the water and drainage schemes. The Cape Times disparagingly summed up the predicament which faced the municipality:

"For several years past Cape Town has been congratulating itself that although things had been bad with them municipally...we were gradually putting matters to rights - that we had the men, we had the scheme, and we had the money too. There has however, come a rude awakening. The improvement scheme, to which we looked as the means of civic salvation, is a long way from completion, but the Council has come to the end of its financial tether, and proposes to ask ratepayers for another loan of upwards of a third of a million sterling. The fact is we do not seem to have quite got the knack of handling our big communal concerns. There is nobody in the Council who seems to have made a special study of the science of finance".<sup>(265)</sup>

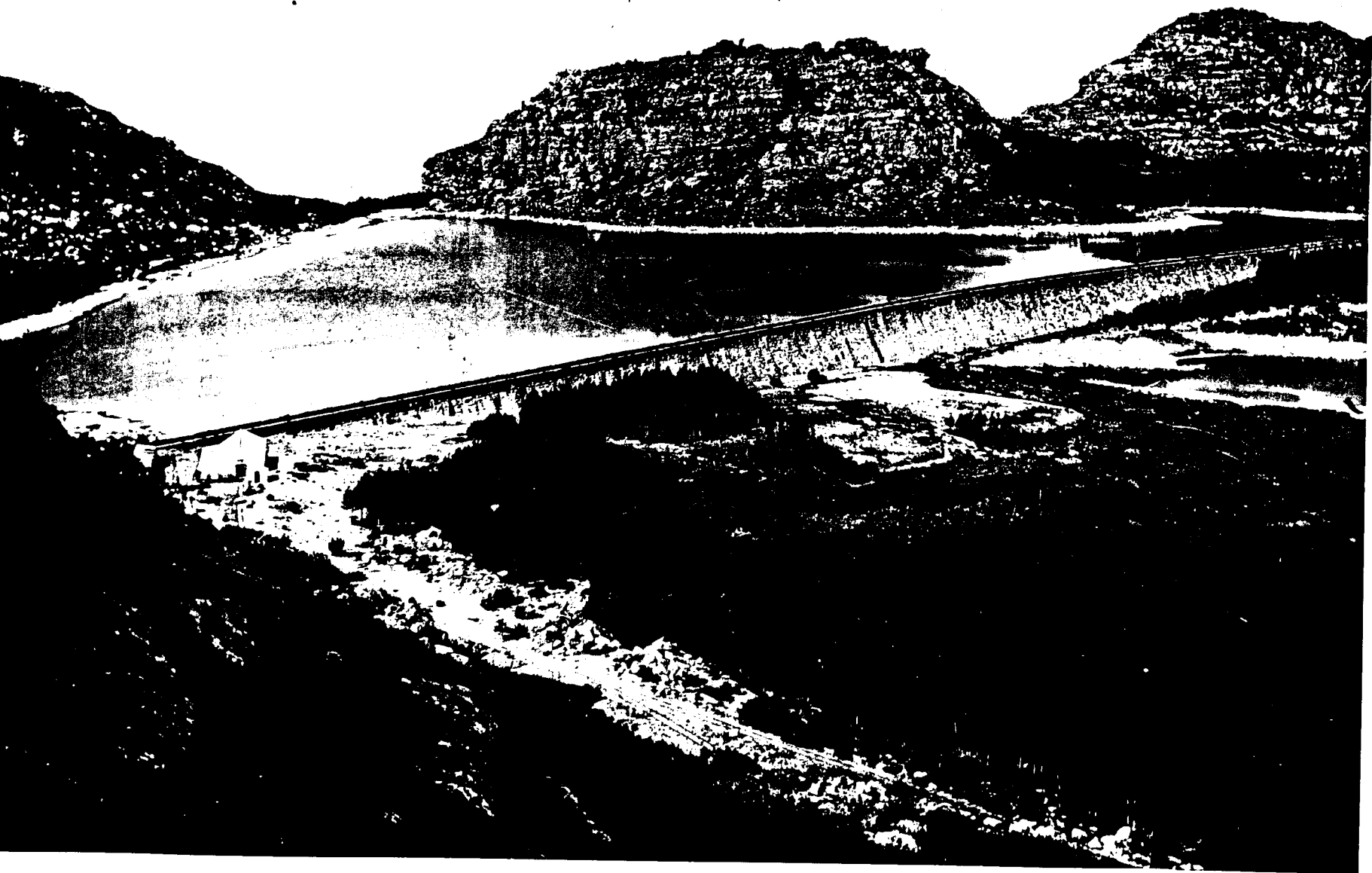
While it had been anticipated that income generated from water would service the municipal debt, in reality, the badly underestimated cost of the water scheme, as well as the fact that new water supplies were being overtaken by demand, meant that the water scheme itself now represented a burden on Cape Town's finance.

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(263) Cape Times, 15 August 1896.

(264) Cape Times, 10 February 1896.

(265) Cape Times, 28 August 1896.



PHOTOGRAPH 3  
THE WOODHEAD DAM c. 1900

By January 1897 the new Woodhead reservoir was finally in use,<sup>(266)</sup> (see photograph 3 opposite) yet this was hardly a time for celebration, for the municipality announced that it was to seek ratepayers' approval to raise a loan for £500 000, which included an amount of £112 000 for a second Table Mountain reservoir.<sup>(267)</sup> This was rejected at a ratepayers meeting which refused to sanction further loans or expenditure on improvements, and demanded a poll on the issue.<sup>(268)</sup> The growing dissatisfaction on the part of ratepayers was to give rise to the reemergence of the supporters of the former 'dirty party', in what was to develop into a major struggle between reformists and anti-reformists for control over the Town House.

The dissension that arose in 1897 in some aspects echoed the earlier conflicts of 1861 and 1882, in as much as it represented a division of interests between the reformist businessmen who now dominated the council, and the old rentier classes and their tenants. The influence of this latter group had diminished considerably since the 1880's, not only due to changes to the municipal franchise, but also because of their declining economic position due to the fundamental changes that were taking place within the city's economy. The increasing importance of commerce in the economy and the growth of the suburbs saw a relative decline of investment in cheap housing and rent based income. Nevertheless, those opposed to further municipal expenditure continued to draw on the support of the working classes and small householders who perceived these reforms as serving the interests of the city's dominant class. Indeed charges of municipal corruption also formed a large part in the mobilisation of

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(266) The Woodhead reservoir represented a remarkable feat of engineering at the time. The site necessitated the construction of an aerial cableway and tramway for the transportation of material and labour. The masonry dam had a capacity of 225 million gallons.

(267) Cape Times, 16 January 1897.

(268) *ibid.*

ratepayers against the Council.<sup>(269)</sup> Similarly, reformists continued to label their opponents as 'dirty' and used racial criteria to explain the conflict, which was used to mobilise the English-speaking middle classes to bolster their control of the Town House.

The campaign against the sanctioning of further municipal loans saw the re-emergence of leaders of the Dirty Party such as J.C.Hofmeyer and C.Kinsley. Hofmeyer in particular was successful in drawing attention to the unprofessional financial planning of the reformers, contributing to a surprise defeat of the municipal loan at a poll of ratepayers. The Cape Times which had itself criticised aspects of municipal government was shocked and disillusioned by the resurgence of popular opinion against reform, and labeled the results of the poll a fiasco.<sup>(270)</sup> Within days of the poll five reformist councillors resigned, including J. Garlick, T.J. O'Reilly, W. Hay, F.Y. St Leger and the mayor J.W. Attwell.<sup>(271)</sup>

In its analysis of the poll the Cape Times was reluctant to ascribe the defeat to popular objection to more water but rather to the manner in which the Table Mountain schemes had been carried out<sup>(272)</sup> as well as to rumours of corruption.<sup>(273)</sup> The most damaging criticism centered on the gross underestimates of the cost of the water schemes, as well as the perception that while the council was spending more and more on water projects, water supply had actually deteriorated. The ability of Thomas

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(269) Cape Times, 13 February 1897.

(270) Cape Times, 11 February 1897.

(271) Although T.J. O'Reilly (a broker and agent at law) had been identified as a reformer, he is representative of a small group of councillors, outside of the 'Adderley Street interest' who stood for economy, and who cannot be linked too strongly to any of the emergent parties. see Chapter Two.

(272) Cape Times, 11 February 1897.

(273) *ibid.*



Stewart, the council's hydraulic engineer was brought into question. In coming to the defence of Stewart and the Council, the Cape Times brushed off these allegations and cast aspersions on the motives of those opposed to the loan:

"There is always a cheap sneer to be had at our one and only hydraulic engineer...,but after all in such matters the opinion of a trained engineer does carry more weight with the intelligent portion of mankind than the hasty and heady judgment of the men in the street. We employ experts because it is the custom of the civilized world to do so and to trust them in their own business. It may seem a better course to the critical persons who have now scored their victory to get our engineering done by scavengers...and shoeblacks." (274)

As it became apparent that the Council's defeat at the poll had brought the future of municipal reform into question and threatened their control over the Town House, reaction against the anti-reformists sharpened. Once again calls were made to remove financial decision-making from the hands of ratepayers and place it under parliamentary control. (275)

It soon became obvious to the remaining councillors that the defeat threatened not only the continuation of the water and drainage schemes, but the very functioning of the municipality itself. In a calculated gamble a mayoral statement signed by ten councillors threatened their mass resignation unless the ratepayers reversed the decision not to approve further expenditure on the water and drainage schemes:

"Council...cannot see their way to remain longer in office unless provision be made for these two important public works [water and drainage] on which they have taken their stand. They therefore place their resignations in your hands...except in the event of ratepayers authorising the taking of steps to reverse the refusal of the two works..." (276)

The gamble paid off. As a result of the mayoral statement a public meeting was organised on the 6 May 1897, to call for a

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(274) Cape Times, 11 February 1897.

(275) Cape Times, 13 February 1897.

(276) Cape Times, 24 March 1897.

vote of confidence in the Council. The Cape Times urged businessmen to attend as it was concerned that the "boulder element" would once again demand a poll and attempt to "turn progressive councillors out".<sup>(277)</sup> These fears were to be realised and once again a poll was demanded at the ratepayer's meeting.

In the second poll held in July 1897, the reformers managed to gain ratepayer support for the municipal loan. The Council had been uncertain of victory, and fears of revival of the anti-reformists dominated in the weeks before the poll. Those opposing the loan were seen to resemble the Dirty Party of the 1850's and 1880's, although now dubbed the "wreckers" by the press.<sup>(278)</sup> The 'clean party' or the 'progressives' as they were sometimes called, were perceived by their opponents to represent the interests of the city's businessmen with Council being a clique, "the members of which make things comfortable for one another".<sup>(279)</sup> The 'wreckers' on the other hand were a disparate group of householders, large property owners and the working classes, united by the issue of municipal debt, who questioned the necessity of a further reservoir, who feared a rise in property rates, and were concerned about allegations of municipal corruption. The Cape Times had feared that this combination had the potential to defeat the reformers, particularly the "voting Malay's" which it continued to stereotype as a:

"large class of small householders and occupiers which loves filth and cannot be expected to pay willingly for cleanliness".<sup>(280)</sup>

Furthermore the working class householders were seen to be

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(277) Cape Times, 6 May 1897.

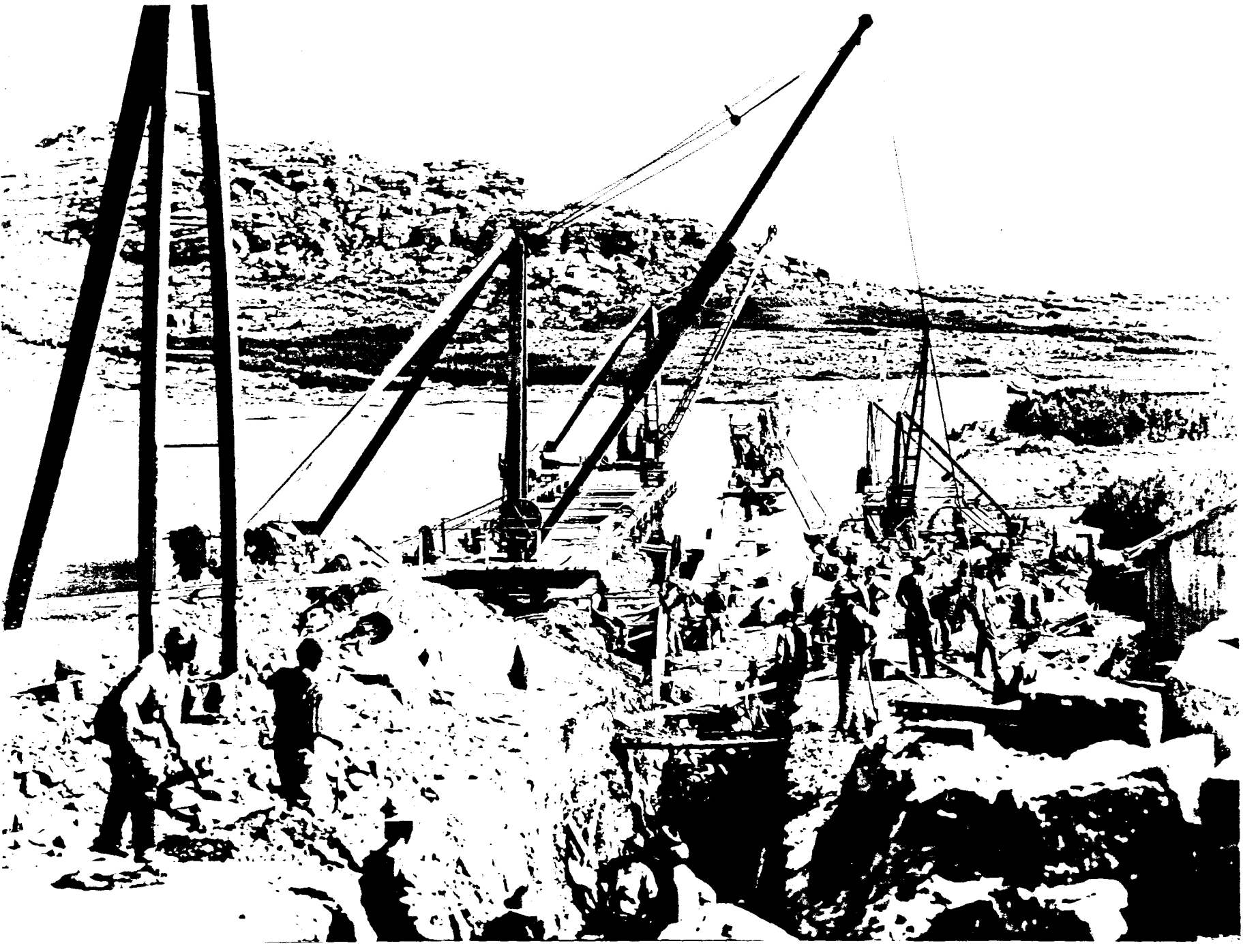
(278) Cape Times 29 July 1897. Prominent candidates amongst this group included J.C. Hofmeyer; Dr. Van Oppel; and Mr. Mc Machlan, who were supporters of the ratepayers association.

(279) Cape Times, 29 January 1897.

(280) Cape Times, 21 July 1897.

PHOTOGRAPH 4

The Woodhead Dam under construction c. 1898



deceived and influenced by the 'wreckers':

"...the language habitually used by Mr Hofmeyer and those who sort\* with him is calculated to convey to those small property owners, slum owners many of them, that a raising of the rates is really at issue; and the waving of that red flag suffices to send them headlong to the poll to vote "Nay" to anything and every thing...."(281)

While it was asserted that :

"...the men who have the biggest pull municipally are those who, like the two or three conspicuous leaders of the present wrecker party, are agents for a great deal of house property."(282)

Despite the fears that had been voiced, the poll resulted in a substantial majority in favour of the loan. While the victory may have been enhanced by the new system of multiple or plural voting which benefited the middle classes,(283) in effect the usually apathetic middle classes had been mobilised to reverse the position of the reformists.

The significance of the re-emergence of divisions within the municipality in the mid-1890's over the issue of water supply and municipal reform must be seen in the context of the earlier conflicts that took place in the 1850's and the 1880's. A theme common to each of these periods is that of the issue of water supply. That it should occupy a central position amongst social reforms is due to its enormous cost. The fact that the issue not only coincided with but was central to the major political conflicts that periodically arose within the town council, cannot be ascribed simply to its cost alone. Indeed it represents far more than a conflict between those who needed water and those who would have to pay for it.

Water supply was a political issue, and as such became bound up with the racial, class and economic conflicts of this period.

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(281) Cape Times, 21 July 1897. \*sort: archaic term meaning 'to agree with'.

(282) *ibid.*

(283) V.Bickford-Smith, "Keeping your own Council", p.202. The plural voted benefited businessmen who lived in the suburbs but owned property in the city.

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During the 1850's the failed attempt to remove the authority of water supply from the municipality revealed that the town's commercial classes did not have the power to win control over the Town House, and sought to divide and weaken its authority. But by the 1880's, fundamental shifts that were taking place in Cape Town's economy and society enabled commercial interests and the middle classes to make a direct bid for control of the Town-House.

It has been suggested that the commercial interests had been successfully kept from gaining control of the town council due to an alliance of large property owners, Dutch-speaking householders, and the underclasses. The former resisted major reforms such as water and sanitation projects, because they realised they would have to pay for them; the latter group rejected water schemes because they feared a subsequent increase in rents, and similarly saw water schemes to be in the benefit of the merchant and commercial interests.

While in the 1850's reformists such as Solomon had argued for the augmentation of water supply, both on humanitarian and commercial grounds, by the 1880's, reformists saw the underclass as an obstacle to developing water supply, and sought to isolate and exclude them in political and social terms. In this they were successful, and the 1880's saw the unhinging of the alliance of interests which had held together the so-called dirty party. The declining position of the large property owners within Cape Town's economy would inevitably have given way to the ascendancy of the commercial classes, and probably much earlier, if it were not for the support of the working class.

The reaction against reform in the 1890's, particularly against the augmentation of water supply, has its roots in these earlier conflicts. Although the 'wreckers' were related to the 'dirty

PHOTOGRAPH 5

Hely Hutchinson Dam c. 1900



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party' interests, they should more properly be seen as the beginning of the emergence of the smaller working and middle class ratepayers interest groups, which were soon to crystallise into ratepayers associations. The Cape Times had expressed the need for a civic association, but one that was "sympathetic and constructive" and having:

"a definite set of principles classified as progressive, and its primary task would be to bring together the small minority of ratepayers who take enough interest in the subject to have consciously arrived at these views, to enable this minority to exert some sort of influence on the vast inert mass of their fellows..." (284)

Ratepayers' Associations were to arise in the following decade, but not of the sort the Cape Times envisaged.

By the end of the nineteenth century the issue of water supply had begun to move beyond the informal alliance of large property owners and working class tenants and householders. Instead the mid-1890's saw the development of a new meaning to reform amongst small householders which placed an emphasis on economy and efficiency in the government of the city.

The period from the 1850's through to the 1890's was one in which municipal politics and water supply were thoroughly intertwined. Most important, the issues of class and race which had become bound up with the augmentation of water supply were to have a detrimental effect in the next century, as water was increasingly seen as a class interest, and became a political as well as a social issue, eventually to the city's detriment, and ultimately to affect the form of its spatial development.

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(284) Cape Times, 16 September 1897.

PHOTOGRAPH 5

Hyman Liberman: Mayor of Cape Town 1903-1906





## CHAPTER TWO

## "If Moses Came To Cape Town" (1)

THE CONFLICT BETWEEN CITY AND SUBURB FOR CONTROL OVER  
THE WATER RESOURCES OF THE HINTERLAND: 1900-1913.

In contrast to the 1890's, which saw the completion of the Woodhead Dam and the start of construction of the Hely Hutchinson Dam, no new water schemes were undertaken during the period between 1900 and 1913.<sup>(2)</sup> This was not the result of an overabundance of water supply, for by the end of this period Cape Town and the suburban municipalities of the Cape Peninsula, were to experience one of the severest water shortages in their history. While a massive water scheme in the hinterland had been proposed as a long term solution to the Cape Peninsula's water problem, the scale of such a project was such that no single municipality could attempt it alone. Despite the benefits of a single large hinterland scheme, the city and suburbs were unable to cooperate with one another to make this a reality. The consequences of this were far reaching, ultimately precipitating a political crisis that was to re-shape the face of the Cape Peninsula's local government.

A fundamental question that recurs throughout the period covered by this chapter is why no progress was made in augmenting water supply? Two basic reasons may be put forward. Firstly water supply became strongly linked to the issue of municipal

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- (1) Cape Times, 11 October 1906. The Mayor of Cape Town, Hyman Liberman used a biblical metaphor to justify the continued use of Table Mountain as the only source for the city's water supply.
- (2) Although construction of the Hely Hutchinson dam was started in 1899, water was only supplied in 1904 when it was completed.

unification between Cape Town and the suburbs. The fact that the municipalities were unable to reach agreement over unification, had a detrimental impact on their ability to cooperate to develop a joint hinterland scheme. The process of amalgamation started by the Peninsula Commission of 1902 was only concluded in 1913 when critical water shortages finally forced the city and suburbs to cooperate.

A second reason for the delay in augmenting water supplies is to be found within the dynamics of political conflict operating within the city of Cape Town. Indeed, the ascendance of a grouping within the council hostile to the development of any further water schemes, or cooperation with the suburbs, is fundamental to explaining this lack of progress.

It is therefore argued that on one level the conflict over water supply represents a struggle between the city and suburbs for control over water resources of the hinterland. This was overshadowed by a struggle taking place within the city council arising out of class and economic interests. These divisions arose in reaction to excessive municipal expenditure but also echoed the earlier conflicts involving social and class divisions over sanitation, reform and water supply in the nineteenth century.

Three distinct periods may be determined in which these inter-municipal and intra-municipal conflicts overlap. The first period from 1900 to 1904, represents a period of considerable fluidity where the various municipalities debated how best to address the issue of water supply, as many were not convinced that municipal unification was the best solution to the peninsula's problem.

Between 1904 and 1906, attempts at cooperation between city and

suburb were dashed by the ascendancy of an anti-water party within Cape Town. This period forms the focus of this chapter, as it represents a re-emergence of the earlier political conflicts of the nineteenth century, upon which hinges the culmination of the water conflict after 1913, following unification.

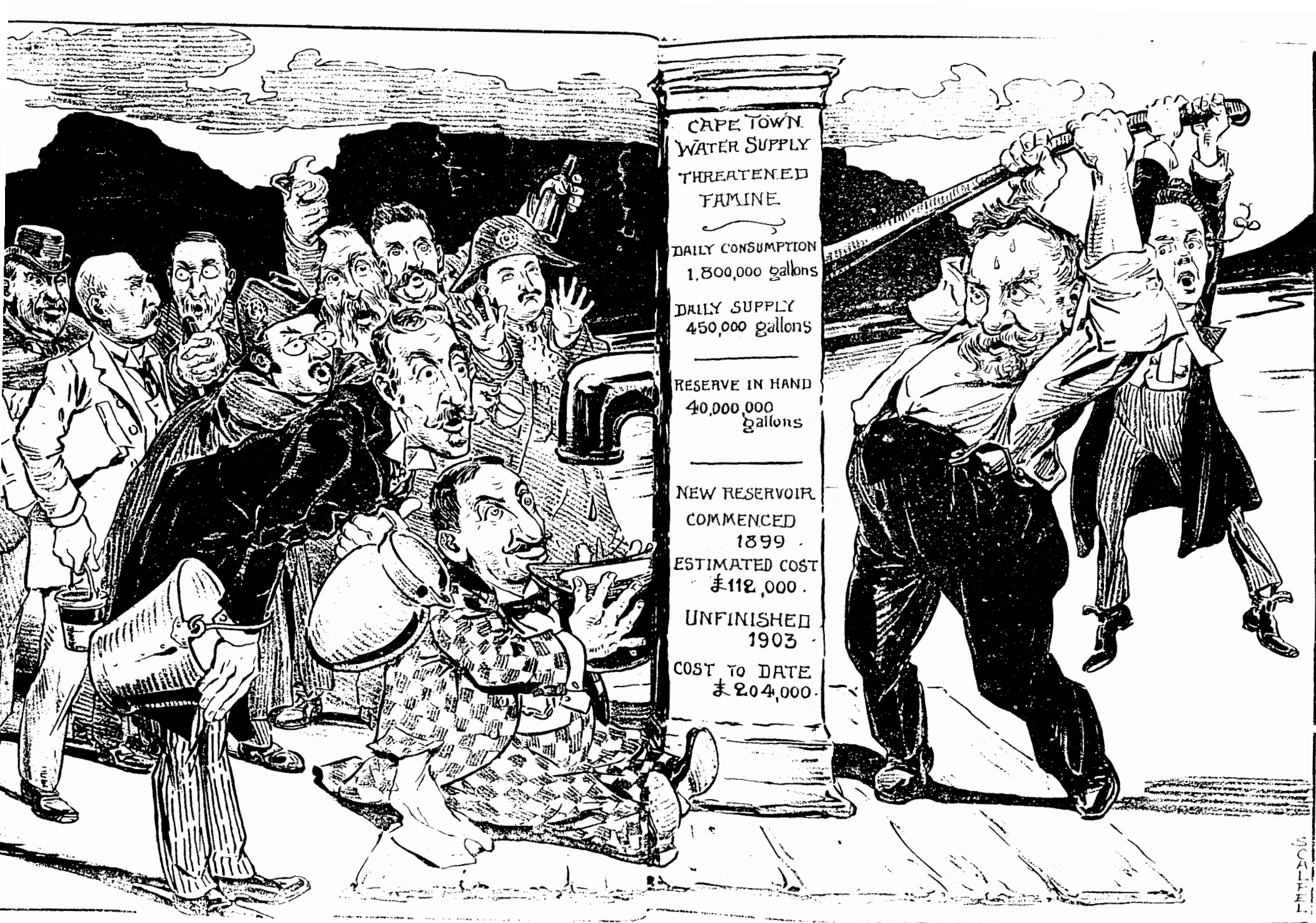
In the final section of this chapter which covers the period after 1906, independent attempts to develop a water scheme were to collapse. It is argued that the failure to solve the water crisis was ultimately to place pressure on the suburbs to amalgamate with the city; a development which is traced in Chapter Three.

#### THE PENINSULA COMMISSION AND WATER SUPPLY 1900-1904

At the beginning of this period the Cape Peninsula seemed set to encounter a severe and prolonged water shortage. Even the Hely Hutchinson dam which was under construction [see photograph 5 opposite] was not considered sufficient to meet the demand as water consumption rose by some 83% between 1896 and 1902.<sup>(3)</sup> The outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War in 1899 had resulted in large numbers of refugees and soldiers flooding into Cape Town which placed enormous strains on the city's social and civic fabric. Increased demand had also arisen as a result of an economic boom brought about by the war. Water shortages severely tested Cape Town's sanitation system, while overcrowded and unhealthy living conditions contributed to high mortality rates, and eventually to

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(3) Minute of the Mayor of Cape Town, Annual reports of the City Engineer: 1896-1902



The Owl 3 April 1903 : Our Parish Pump.

the outbreak of bubonic plague in 1901.<sup>(4)</sup> With no sign of water consumption subsiding, and the Table Mountain catchment area utilised to its full potential, the city council was compelled to consider the hinterland as a source for a new water supply scheme. A cartoon in The Owl, a weekly satirical magazine, captures the concern felt during this period, as it seemed that the parish pump was about to run dry. (see cartoon 5 facing page)

Given the distance of the nearest source of water supply outside the Cape Peninsula, it was considered that such a scheme would be beyond the means of most municipalities. For this reason Cape Town was to call on the colonial government to undertake an investigation into the means by which a hinterland scheme could best be established.<sup>(5)</sup> Similarly the Cape Times warned of the economic consequences for the city if the water crisis was not acted on:

"...it must be prepared for stagnation, commercially and industrially. Unless Cape Town can supply shipping with all the water it requires, the Harbour Board might just as well stay its hand in the matter of dock development, and allow trade to flow through other channels. The interests of the whole community demand that the shipping be afforded all the water that it requires."<sup>(6)</sup>

The colonial authorities were deeply concerned about the deteriorating situation, particularly after the outbreak of bubonic plague, and with unsanitary conditions increasing the likelihood of further outbreaks of contagious disease. It was a combination of these factors that moved the Colonial Government

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- (4) E.B. van Heyningen; "Cape Town and the Plague of 1901", in C. Saunders et.al. (editors), Studies in the History of Cape Town, volume 4, University of Cape Town, 1984.
- (5) J. Parker ; Unification: some of its aspects, Cape Town, 1910, p.2.
- (6) Cape Times; 20 January 1902.

TOWN HALL



THE OWL 27 February 1903  
OUT THEY GO

7  
to appoint a parliamentary commission in 1902, to investigate the water and sanitation crisis affecting the Peninsula Municipalities,<sup>7</sup> and to report on possible solutions.

The report of the Peninsula Commission was to be comprehensive and far reaching, having a profound impact on the course of the development of the Cape Peninsula's water supply, and represents a major turning point in its history.

While the formation of the Peninsula Commission was a direct response to the Cape Peninsula's water crisis, it soon became apparent that its investigations were to be far wider than originally anticipated, with its scope broadened to include other aspects of water-related problems facing local government, such as the provision of drainage and sewage systems as well as the form that municipal government should take. The investigations of the commission were extensive, being conducted over a period of ten months and its findings filling three volumes. Despite this thoroughness, its recommendations were controversial, partly due to the fact that it trivialised the sectionalist attitudes of councillors from the peninsula municipalities and imposed the concept of unification as a panacea for their problems. While the Peninsula Commission's proposals were interpreted by the press as the new broom to sweep municipal government clean, (see cartoon 7 facing page) it failed to achieve its objective of municipal unification. The report was nevertheless to dominate municipal thinking for the next decade, and prepared the way for unification which eventually took place 1913.

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(7) G.21-1903; Cape of Good Hope(Colony), Report of a Commission appointed to enquire into and report upon certain matters affecting Cape Peninsula municipalities and the Cape Divisional Council, 3 volumes. See also E.B van Heyningen; "The 'small Greek cities' of the Cape Peninsula" Contree, no.10, July 1981, pp.5-8; for an analysis of the Commission and its findings.

The Commission had correctly perceived that the Peninsula's water and sanitation problems were exacerbated by the proliferation of independent municipal authorities.<sup>(8)</sup> The Commission began with the premise that the problem was an administrative as much as a practical one, and suggested that the various Peninsula municipalities unite to form a single authority to avoid duplication of services.<sup>(9)</sup> Less emphasis was given to an alternative suggestion for the establishment of a joint central board that could oversee the operation of common water and sewage schemes. While it recognised that the Cape Peninsula's water supply problem could only be addressed effectively by a joint authority, the commission's promotion of a single municipality as the only solution<sup>(10)</sup> was a major reason for the rejection of its report by a number of the municipalities.

While the main emphasis of the Commission's final report was on municipal unification as a solution to the Cape Peninsula's water crisis, equally important were its guidelines and suggestions concerning the direction in which future development of water supplies should be conducted. It was within the parameters of these recommendations that the protracted debate over the Peninsula's future water supply were to take place.

One of the most significant recommendations of the Commission concerned the specifications which it laid down for any future water scheme. Most important, it established beyond all doubt

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- (8) The break up of the Liesbeeck municipality in the 1880's was held up as a reason why a unified peninsula municipality could not work. See J.D Linnegar; "From Village to Municipality: A History of Wynberg to 1903", BA Hons., University of Cape Town, 1975.
- (9) G.21-1903, op.cit.. The Report of the Commission was accompanied by a dissenting minority report.
- (10) G.21-1903, op.cit., Volume 3, pp.3-27. The minority report of Dr. A.J. Gregory, medical officer of health for the Cape Colony, argued that two smaller municipalities should be created instead of one single large municipality.



that no further sources of water supply could be economically exploited within the Cape Peninsula and that future supplies would have to be drawn from the hinterland. It also recommended that a hinterland scheme should be capable of supplying 10 million gallons per day; that it have a minimum storage capacity of 2000 million gallons; and that local authorities be empowered to raise up to £1 500 000 for its construction.<sup>(11)</sup> The envisaged scheme would dwarf Cape Town's largest existing reservoir, the Woodhead dam, whose 210 million gallon capacity represented only a tenth of that of the proposed scheme. As the cost of a hinterland scheme would far exceed that of the Table Mountain reservoirs, considerable opposition was anticipated from ratepayers if it were to be attempted by individual municipalities.

While all the municipalities agreed that a hinterland water scheme would eventually be needed, few were convinced that municipal unification was the way to achieve it. Indeed the Commission's recommendations sharply contradicted the opinions expressed by the majority of witnesses.<sup>(12)</sup> Of the seven peninsula municipalities, Rondebosch, Mowbray and Claremont were the most amenable to amalgamation, while Cape Town, Woodstock, Wynberg and Sea Point preferred to retain their independence. Amongst the suburban municipalities, it was Woodstock which most resisted unification, motivated by its civic pride which was inflated by the fact that it was at the height of an economic boom. As the third largest town in the Cape Colony, it boasted a rapidly growing population, newly established industries, a low

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(11) G.21-1903, Volume 1, pp.11-20.

(12) J. Parker and Dr. L.A.W. Beck; The future water supply of Cape Town and the Cape peninsula, Cape Town, 1904, p.3.

municipal rate and public debt.<sup>(13)</sup> [see table 1 below]

TABLE ONE  
COMPARATIVE RATEABLE INCOME; PROPERTY RATE AND PUBLIC DEBT  
OF THE PENINSULA MUNICIPALITIES c.1900

	£ MUNICIPAL INCOME	£ RATEABLE VALUE	d./£ PROPERTY/ TENANT RATE	£ PUBLIC DEBT	£ DEBT PER HEAD
CAPE TOWN	245 119	9 020 210	2.0	651 850	13.6
WOODSTOCK	35 007	1 426 105	2.0	13 500	2.3
GRN POINT	13 401	1 109 650	2.25	12 017	4.1
MDWBRAY	10 706	614 500	1.25	14 126	4.5
CLAREMONT	13 741	995 000	1.25/8.0	17 035	2.7
WYNBERG	12 374	1 023 816	1.5/8.0	38 247	7.7
RNDBOSCH	7 479	695 246	1.25/8.0	6 400	1.9

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SOURCE: G.21-1903, Volume 1, pp.5;8;9;10.  
The Argus Annual and South African Directory.(various)

As a result of its confidence in its future growth as an industrial centre, Woodstock came to see itself as the leader of the suburban municipalities, and envisaged itself initiating an independent water scheme to supply the peninsula. Woodstock's ambitions came to represent a political obstacle to municipal unification as its geographic situation acted as a physical barrier between the city and the rest of the suburbs.

Cape Town was also opposed to amalgamation, but for different reasons. Unlike the suburbs, by the turn of the century the city already had an established drainage and sewage system.<sup>(14)</sup>

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(13) J. Parker; Unification, op.cit., p.35.

(14) The municipality of Green Point and Sea Point was the only other municipality that had a drainage and sewage system at this time. See J. Parker; Unification, op.cit., p.12. Also see N.Kagan; The Growth and Development of the Municipality of Green Point and Sea Point, BA Hons., University of Cape Town, 1975.

For Cape Town, unification would have meant the expenditure of large amounts of money outside its boundaries to extend and integrate its infrastructure with the suburbs. Cape Town therefore wanted to limit its cooperation to the development of water supply. Instead of unification it considered that the establishment of a Peninsula Water Board with the limited responsibility of procuring and distributing water as best and least expensive solution for its needs.

The concept of a central water authority was attractive to Cape Town because such an organization would ultimately be controlled by the city on a proportional basis, as its financial power was far greater than that of the combined suburban municipalities.<sup>(15)</sup> A further reason why Cape Town favoured a single Peninsula Water authority was that its waterworks department already operated in the manner of a water board in that it had for years been selling water to Sea Point and Maitland as well as the Table Bay Harbour Board (TBHB) and also more recently to Woodstock Municipality. Indeed the sale of water brought considerable income for the city coffers<sup>(16)</sup> as may be seen in Table 2A and 2B below.

TABLE 2A

VALUE OF WATER BOUGHT BY CAPE TOWN'S MAJOR CONSUMERS (£)

	1901	1902	1903	1904	1905	1906
TBHB	22,751	33,621	30,642	29,438	32,377	31,672
CAPE TOWN(1)	24,871	27,036	25,835	26,525	25,802	26,182
SEA POINT	4,492	4,959	5,410	5,923	6,221	6,482
CAPE TOWN(2)	894	1,869	2,091	3,261	1,845	2,227
OTHER(3)	11,697	12,005	5,218	3,396	3,870	4,877
TOTAL	64,490	79,490	69,196	68,543	70,115	71,490

SOURCE: Minute of the Mayor, 1900-1907.

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(15) J. Parker, Unification, p.34.

(16) J. Parker and Dr. L.A.W. Beck, The future water supply of Cape Town, p.3.

TABLE 2B

INCOME AS A PERCENTAGE DERIVED FROM THE SALE OF WATER TO  
CAPE TOWN'S MAJOR CONSUMERS

	1901	1902	1903	1904	1905	1906
TBHB	35%	42%	44%	43%	46%	44%
CAPE TOWN(1)	39%	34%	37%	39%	37%	37%
SEA POINT	7%	6%	8%	9%	9%	9%
CAPE TOWN(2)	1%	2%	3%	5%	3%	3%
OTHER(3)	18%	15%	8%	5%	6%	7%

(1) Householder, business and government consumption.

(2) Cape Town corporation consumption.

(3) includes Woodstock and Maitland.

SOURCE: Minute of the Mayor 1901-1906

Woodstock on the other hand was against a water board, at least if it were to fall under the authority of Cape Town, for it would deprive the municipality of a large potential income and would bring it under the city's political control.<sup>(17)</sup> Another reason for Woodstock's dismissal of a central water board arose as a result of its involvement in the recently established Suburban Municipal Water Board [SMWB].

The SMWB had emerged out of the Cape Town District Water Works Company which had been sold to several suburban municipalities in 1899 at a cost of £210 000 <sup>(18)</sup>. The SMWB, which was jointly managed by the municipalities of Rondebosch, Mowbray, Claremont and Woodstock, was seen by Woodstock as a basis for developing an alternative Water Board which could be capable of developing its own hinterland scheme controlled by the suburbs and independent of the city's authority. More optimistically it was hoped that a suburban scheme would be self financing by selling water at a

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(17) E.B. van Heyningen, "The 'small Greek cities'", p.6.

(18) G.21-1903, Volume 1, pp.13-14. For an overview of the SMWB history see SMW 4/17, Secretary: Suburban Municipal Waterworks Committee, 1890-1914, p.1-8.

profit to Cape Town, the Colonial Government and other peninsula municipalities such as Wynberg.<sup>(19)</sup> Thus for Cape Town and Woodstock and its suburban partners, the whole issue of a water board became one not only of how additional water supply was to be obtained, but who would have control over it.

It is for these reasons that the municipal response to the commission's recommendation for unification was largely negative. This must be measured against the background of structural economic problems facing the various municipalities. While these were to prevent the municipalities from working together in the short term, in the longer term they were destined to force city and suburb to cooperate.

So far it has been suggested that the rapid growth of the population of the Cape Peninsula had been the underlying cause of the water and sanitation crisis confronting both city and suburb. This growth was geographically uneven however, creating different problems for Cape Town and the suburban municipalities. The rapid growth of Cape Town's population around the turn of the century as a result of the Anglo-Boer War had been largely of a temporary nature.<sup>(20)</sup> This growth also had the effect of masking a secondary and more permanent outflow of the middle classes to the suburbs which had been underway since the late 1880's. Thus in the decade between 1891 and 1902 Cape Town's permanent population grew by 33% compared to the 176% of Wynberg; 165% of

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(20) For example the population had swelled due to an influx of refugees, prisoners of war, soldiers and an increase in shipping. The Peninsula Commission put the number at 11 371.

(21) G.21-1903, op.cit., Volume 1, p.5.

Mowbray; 158% of Sea Point and 110% growth of Claremont.<sup>(21)</sup> [see table 3 below ] A similar shift in working class movement from Cape Town to the suburbs is evident from the massive 330% increase in the population of Woodstock in the same decade.<sup>(22)</sup>

TABLE 3

TABLE SHOWING POPULATION INCREASE FOR EACH MUNICIPALITY:  
POPULATION AND THE PERCENTAGE INCREASE BETWEEN 1891 AND 1902

MUNICIPALITY	POPULATION 1891	POPULATION 1902	% INCREASE
CAPE TOWN	47 955	64 171	33%
WOODSTOCK	5 815	25 032	330%
SEA POINT	2 926	7 567	158%
MOWBRAY	3 098	8 237	165%
RONDEBOSCH	3 378	5 791	71%
CLAREMONT	6 252	13 166	110%
WYNBERG	4 952	13 697	176%

Source: G.21-1902, Volume One, p.5.

As the growth rate of Cape Town took place at a slower rate than that of the suburbs, the proportion of the population living in the city compared to the remainder of the Peninsula dropped from 63% to 45% between 1891 and 1902 <sup>(23)</sup> In contrast to its proportionally shrinking population Cape Town had a growing municipal debt calculated at £15 per head compared to the significantly lower £8 per head owed by the combined suburban municipalities.<sup>(24)</sup> Coupled to this was the fact that the suburban municipalities had a much lower ratable valuation, partly due to the absence of commerce and industry.[see Table One above] While the suburbs had a proportionally smaller debt,

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(21) G.21-1903, Volume 1, p.5.

(22) *ibid.*

(23) This figure is derived from census returns for the population of the city and the suburbs in 1891 and 1902. see G.21-1903, p.5.

(24) J. Parker, Unification, pp.60-61.

their rateable income averaged only £1 2s. per head compared to that of £2 4s. for Cape Town.<sup>(25)</sup> In other words Cape Town's proportionally rising municipal debt and high rate of taxation was to undermine its ability to finance a hinterland water scheme on its own. Conversely the suburbs were unable to raise large enough loans because of their limited sources of revenue and narrow rateable tax base.<sup>(26)</sup>

The city and suburbs also had divergent problems with regard to their water supply. For Cape Town the problem was not only one of sufficient water for industry and shipping; or for flushing drains and sewers or watering streets, but was also an issue that affected the city's finance, as water represented an important source of municipal income. Cape Town's largest and most profitable client which purchased water for shipping was the Table Bay Harbour Board,[TBHB] which not only consumed large amounts of water but also paid a disproportionate amount for the quantity it received.<sup>(27)</sup> For example, in 1903 the TBHB consumed 35% of the total metered water supply of Cape Town yet contributed to 44% of the water works department's total income,<sup>(28)</sup> paying six times more than the general metered

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(25) J. Parker, Unification, pp.60-61.

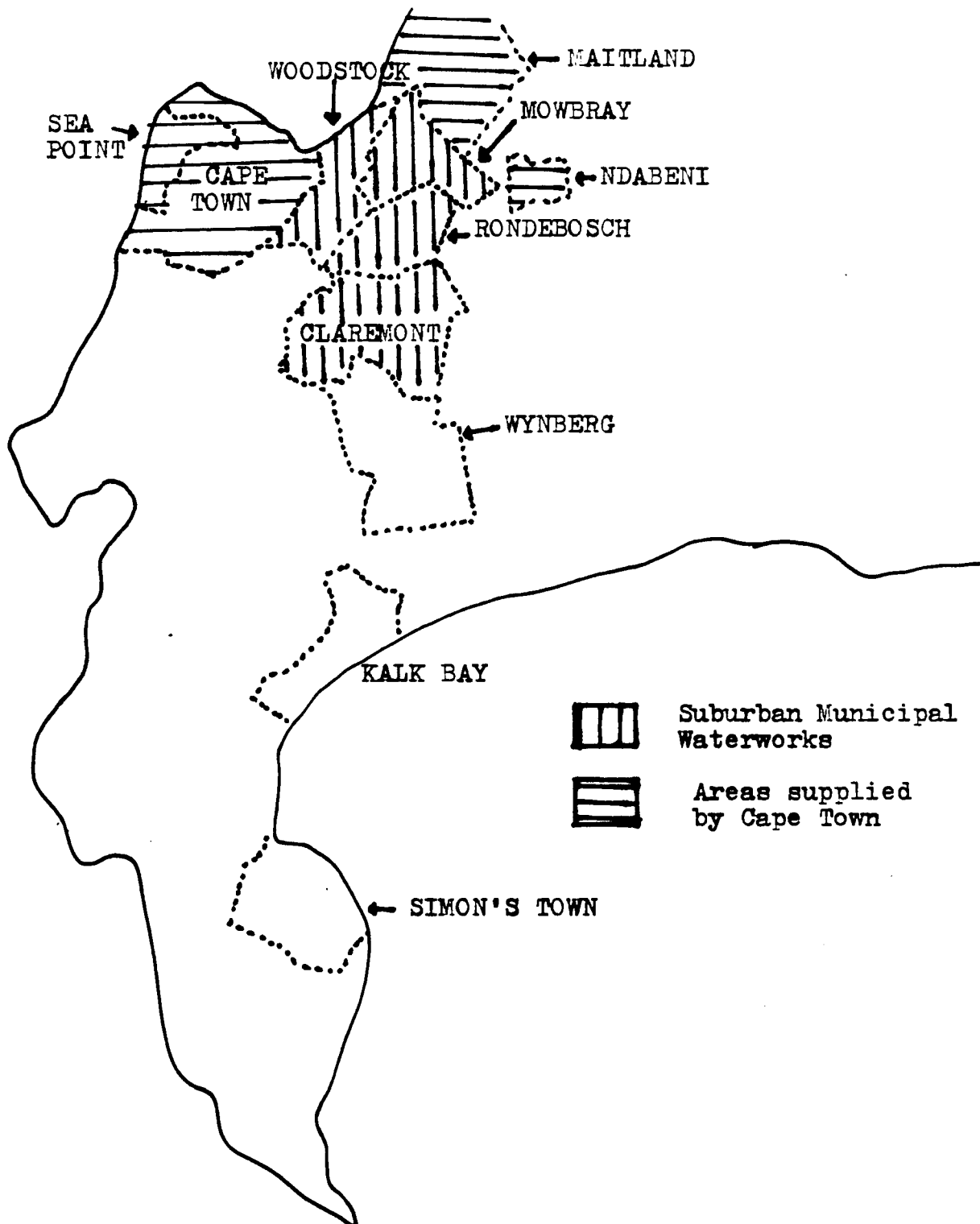
(26) Apart from Woodstock, the suburbs had a relatively little industry against which rates could be levied.

(27) Minute of the Mayor, 1912 (Cape Town); Appendix 9, p.viii, Statement showing the amount of Rates levied, together with the net charges in respect of Water Supply...in Cape Town during the years 1903 to 1912. In 1903 the Table Bay Harbour Board paid a rate of 10 shillings per 1000 gallons (2 shillings per 200 gallons) compared to the metered rate of 1 shilling and 6 pence per 1000 gallons for householders. The cost of this was passed on to shipping. Due to government pressure the rate was eventually lowered to 1 shilling per 1000 gallons in 1911. See also A.7-1880, Cape of Good Hope (Colony), Report of the select committee on the Table Bay Harbour Board. Also see Table 2A above.

(28) Minute of the Mayor, (Cape Town) 1907; Appendix No.8, p.x. This figure is derived from dividing the income from the Table Bay Harbour Board by the total income of the waterworks department. If sources of income other than the sale of water are excluded, (eg. meter charges) the percentage is even higher; approximately 50%.

MAP 5

PENINSULA MUNICIPALITIES AND THE JURISDICTION OF WATER  
AUTHORITIES c. 1900



SOURCE: Based on a map of the Cape Peninsula  
Surveyor Generals Office 1901



rate.<sup>(29)</sup> [See Table 4 below] The income derived from the TBHB, as well as from the sale of water to Sea Point, Maitland

TABLE 4

PERCENTAGE OF CAPE TOWN'S METERED WATER SUPPLY DELIVERED TO ITS MAJOR CONSUMERS: 1900-1912

YEAR	TBHB	COLONIAL GOVERNMENT	IMPERIAL GOVERNMENT	CAPE TOWN CORPORATION	WOODSTK	OTHER
1900	50%	5%	20%	6%	-	18%
1901	43%	5%	28%	5%	3%	16%
1902	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
1903	35%	8%	10%	9%	7%	30%
1904	30%	13%	5%	11%	9%	32%
1905	28%	15%	4%	12%	11%	31%
1906	27%	17%	4%	8%	9%	36%
1907	18%	20%	3%	5%	9%	45%
1908	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
1909	15%	13%	2%	7%	9%	55%
1910	14%	15%	2%	7%	8%	55%
1911	14%	27%	2%	6%	-	52%
1912	14%	30%	1%	6%	-	49%

SOURCE: Minute of the Mayor, 1900-1912.

as well as to Woodstock was largely responsible for the City's Waterworks Department showing a surplus of up to £50 000 in some years.<sup>(30)</sup> For this reason Cape Town was cautious of handing over its profitable Waterworks to a Water Board over which it might only have limited control.

The suburbs on the other hand faced a different set of problems concerning their water supply. The Suburban Municipal Waterwork's main source of supply was at the Albion Springs at Rondebosch, which together with other minor springs could only provide an average of 1 million gallons of water a day compared to the 3 million gallons supplied daily by Cape Town's reservoirs.<sup>(31)</sup> Although the actual yield of the Albion Springs

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(29) Minute of the Mayor, 1912, Appendix 9.

(30) Cape Times, 5 September 1906. Also see Minute of the Mayor, Appendix 8, p.(x), Annual income of waterworks for the years 1897-1906.

(31) G.21-1903, Volume 1, pp.13-14.

was 1 375 000 million gallons per day, 500 000 gallons of this had to flow into the Liesbeeck River as part of the legal share of riparian owners.<sup>(32)</sup> In addition to this a further 175 000 gallons of the springs yield formed part of the 'Ohlsson Servitude'.<sup>(33)</sup> This originated from an agreement made upon the transfer of the Cape Town District Company to the SMWB in 1898, when the brewer, Ohlsson, who was also a major shareholder in the water company, received guarantees that he would receive 175 000 gallons of water per day free of charge for his brewery.<sup>(34)</sup> It is of interest to note that this agreement also stipulated that the SMWB would not supply water to any other brewing company, thus forcing the large brewery in Woodstock to get its water from Cape Town.<sup>(35)</sup> The remaining 700 000 gallons from the springs was then divided between the four municipal partners of the SMWB; Claremont, Mowbray and Woodstock each receiving 200 000 gallons daily, while Rondebosch took 100 000 gallons.<sup>(36)</sup> In practice this meant that Woodstock with a population of 25 000 received the same amount of water as Mowbray which only had a population of 8000.<sup>(37)</sup> The equal distribution of water between the members of the SMWB was to place intense pressure on Woodstock, and had the result of increasing its dependence on Cape Town. Woodstock's insecure position was demonstrated during 1902 when, in the midst of a severe drought, Cape Town threatened to cut off the municipality's daily supply of 100 000 gallons.<sup>(38)</sup> Because

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(32) G.21-1903, Volume 1, p.14.

(33) Cape Times, 16 April 1903.

(34) *ibid.* In monetary terms this represented a loss of about £3000 p.a. for the Suburban Municipal Water Board.

(35) The South African Breweries in Woodstock received its water from the pipeline with which Cape Town supplied the Uitvlugt Native Location.

(36) G.21-1903, op.cit., Volume 1, pp.13-14.

(37) *ibid.*

(38) Cape Times, 20 January 1902. At this time Cape Town was supplying Woodstock with 100 000 gallons daily, or a third of its total supply. In 1904 Woodstock's supply of water from Cape Town peaked at an average daily supply of 101 930 gallons per day. (See appendix, Table 8) Figures compiled from Minute of the Mayor, Annual reports of city engineer or water engineer.

of Woodstock was to become instrumental in steering the suburban municipalities towards developing a hinterland water scheme to make the suburbs less dependent on Cape Town.

When the Report of the Peninsula Commission was finally published in 1903, it received an icy reception from the various municipalities. This was fuelled by the continuing economic boom which had the effect of buoying the peninsula municipalities confidence in their ability to solve their problems by themselves. While it has been argued that Cape Town and Woodstock would have found it difficult to undertake an extensive water project by themselves because of the structural constraints affecting their ability to raise finance, the idea of constructing an independent hinterland water scheme began to look increasingly attractive despite its high costs and the anticipated opposition of ratepayers. Even before the report of the commission was issued in March 1903, both the concepts of municipal unification and a joint water authority had lost considerable ground, and secret investigations in the hinterland were being undertaken by Woodstock and Cape Town. The reminiscences of one Cape Town councillor illustrates the atmosphere of hostility and suspicion that existed between the two municipalities at this time.

" I remember going...to inspect the Berg River Hoek site, and after doing so...[we went to] have a look at Wemmershoek, not so many miles distant. We arrived to find several of the councillors of Woodstock on the site and our reception was chilly in the extreme. We seem to be regarded as spies." (39)

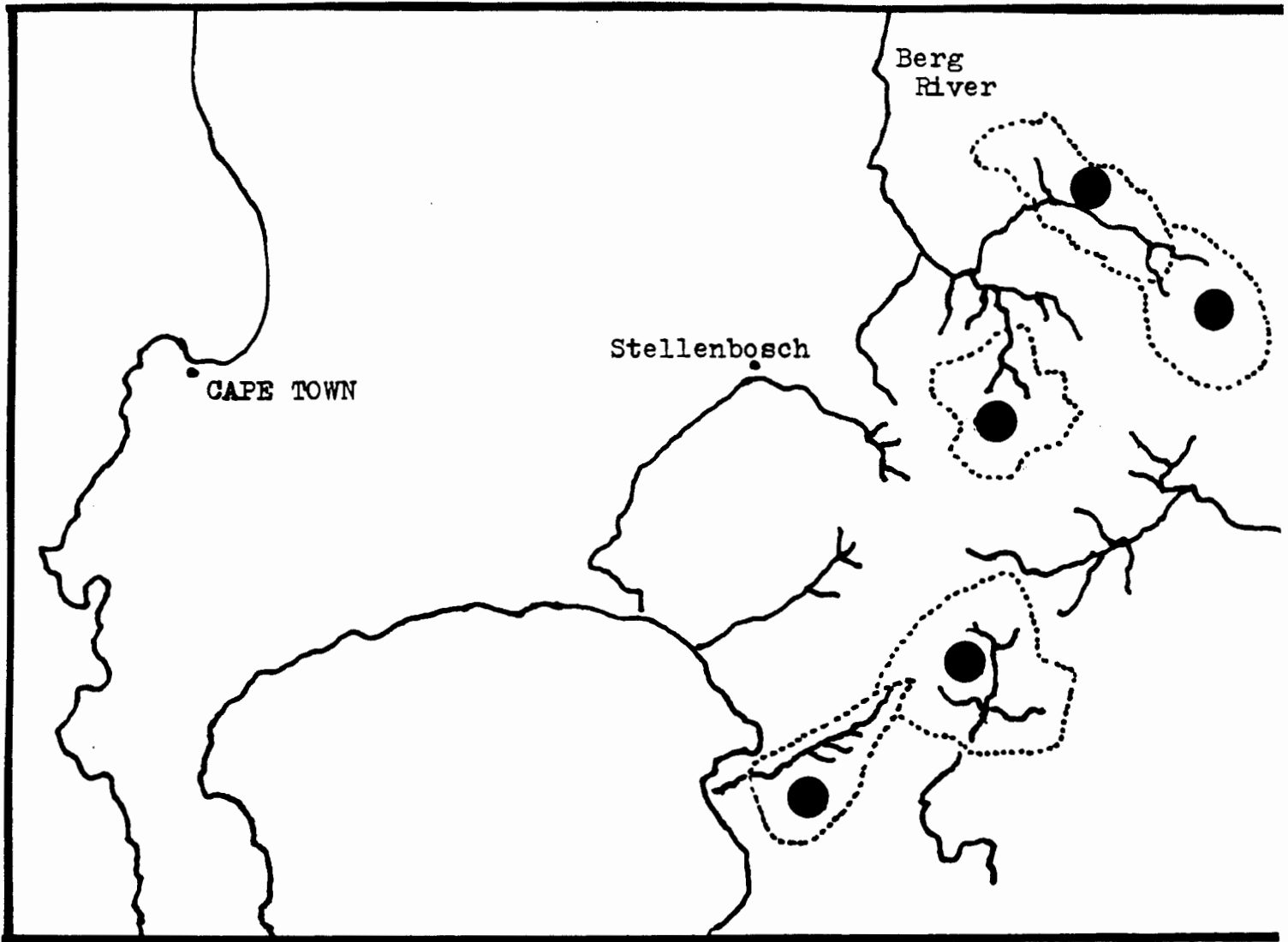
The period following the release of the Peninsula Commission's report in 1903 up until the middle of 1904 represents a phase of considerable fluidity in the approaches of Cape Town and Woodstock to the development of a hinterland scheme. While the report failed to take cognizance of the full extent of the

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(39) W. Duncan-Baxter, Turn Back the Pages: Sixty-Eight Years at the Cape, 1954, p.38.

MAP 6

CONTEMPLATED WATER SCHEMES IN CAPE TOWN'S HINTERLAND



- I Wemmershoek (Woodstock)
- 2 Oliphants Hoek
- 3 Berg River Hoek (Cape Town)
- 4 Palmiet River (Government Railways & Harbours)
- 5 Steenbras (Rondebosch)

traditional rivalries, jealousies and power play between the various municipalities, it did confront them with two options; that of creating a single municipal authority or of establishing a central board of works for the administration of water supply. The two rival municipalities found it difficult to accept these options but they could not reject them entirely as there were doubts over their ability to attempt independent schemes. Cape Town was coming under increasing financial pressure due to its mounting municipal debt and decelerating growth rate. The low rateable income of the suburban municipalities on the other hand would make it difficult for them to float an estimated £1½ million loan on the London money market, needed for a separate hinterland scheme.<sup>(40)</sup> As a result of this uncertainty the relationship between the two municipalities oscillated between cooperation and outright hostility over the next few years. Attempts at cooperation were determined by their recognition that neither municipality could be certain that it would be capable of developing a hinterland scheme on its own, and for this reason the idea of forming a joint water board was never completely abandoned. On the other hand, attempts at cooperation were marred by the fact that both had an interest in being the dominant partner in any water board, for whichever municipality controlled it would control the hinterland water supply, and would in effect determine the direction of the Peninsula's development.

A further obstacle which blocked possible cooperation between Cape Town and Woodstock concerned the choice of a site for a hinterland scheme. As each had financial investments in different areas, both municipalities were determined that their own sites should be selected if a water board were to be established. Woodstock's involvement in the hinterland began in 1900 when the municipality purchased land at Oliphants Hoek in the Wemmershoek Valley ( see map 6 opposite ) at a cost of

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(40) Cape Times, 9 April 1902. The SMWB attempted to raise a loan for £300 000 but it was only half subscribed.

£25 000.<sup>(41)</sup> Cape Town had a similar interest at Berg River Hoek near Fransch Hoek.<sup>(42)</sup> (see map 6 page 119)

During the investigations of the Peninsula Commission both Woodstock and Cape Town had been secretly conducting surveys in these catchment areas in the belief that they would be able to gain government approval for water schemes on these sites. Woodstock hoped that confirmation of its Oliphantshoek site would entrench its standing in a water board constituted by the government and result in financial compensation for its investment. Woodstock was to suffer a setback when the commission pronounced this scheme as 'hastily considered' and 'poorly investigated'.<sup>(43)</sup>

The Oliphantshoek and Berg River Hoek were not the only schemes that had been considered, as the Rondebosch and Mowbray municipalities had purchased land and options in the Steenbras River valley in 1899.<sup>(44)</sup> Other potential sites which had earlier been considered by Cape Town included the Witte River which had been rejected in 1892<sup>(45)</sup> and a site at Du Toits Kloof which had been investigated in 1902.<sup>(46)</sup> Several other sites had also been suggested, but had associated problems. For example a scheme on the Palmiet River would have submerged the village of

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(41) G.21-1903, op.cit., Volume 1, p.18. The Wemmershoek valley had several tributaries with potential for damming, the Oliphant's Hoek area being in the upper reaches of the valley above the present Wemmershoek Dam.

(42) Minute of the Mayor (Cape Town) 1903; Report of R.O. Wynne-Roberts submitted to the Electric, Water Works, and Fire Brigade Committee (15 June 1903), pp.1-16.

(43) G.21-1903, op.cit., Volume 1, p.18.

(44) N. Kagan; 'Growth and Development of Green Point', p.91.

(45) J. Burman; The Cape of Good Intent, Cape Town, 1969, p.110. Also Cape Times, 17 January 1898; and G.21-1903, op.cit., Volume 1, p.17.

(46) Minute of the Mayor (Cape Town) 1903; pp.73-75; and Report of R.O. Wynne-Roberts submitted to the Electric, Water Works, and Fire Brigade Committee (15 June 1903), pp.1-16.

Grabouw, while a scheme at Twenty Four Rivers was considered too distant to be viable.<sup>(47)</sup> Others sites included Zacharias Hoek in the Wemmershoek Valley and Banghoek, a tributary of the Berg River.<sup>(48)</sup>

Despite the intense rivalry that existed between Cape Town and Woodstock, a number of circumstances were to bring the two municipalities closer together to reconsider the formation of a joint water board by the end of 1903. In July of that year a report that the government railway and harbour authorities intended developing its own water scheme along the Klip River, [see map 6] caught both by surprise and effectively tipped the scales in the direction of cooperation between the two municipalities.<sup>(49)</sup> This had come about as a result of the lack of progress of the peninsula municipalities as well as the railway and harbour authority's resistance to the high water tariffs charged by the Cape Town. The proposed scheme threatened to remove the custom of the Harbour Board from the municipality and reduce its ability to finance the Berg River Hoek scheme. Woodstock's proposed Oliphantshoek scheme had made little progress since the criticism by the Peninsula Commission and the report of the Klip River scheme now brought into question its financial viability.

Cape Town reacted swiftly in persuading the railway and harbour authorities to abandon its Klip River scheme.<sup>(50)</sup> In return Cape Town undertook to begin its own scheme within three years.<sup>(51)</sup> A bill would be prepared to place before parliament, guaranteeing

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(47) J. Burman; The Cape of Good Intent, op.cit., p.110.

(48) *ibid.*

(49) Minute of the Mayor (Cape Town) 1903; pp.73-75

(50) Cape Times, 3 August 1903.

(51) *ibid.*

a water supply for government consumption. Woodstock, now fearing isolation due to the government authority's backing for Cape Town's scheme, offered to join the city in the formation of a Peninsula Water Board.<sup>(52)</sup> By October 1903, the municipalities of Cape Town, Green Point and Sea Point as well as the four municipalities of the SMWB had formed a Joint Water Committee with the objective of identifying a potential site for a hinterland water supply scheme for the Cape Peninsula.<sup>(53)</sup> By the end of the year it appeared that the question of the Peninsula's water supply was to be finally settled through the establishment of a single peninsula water authority.

In a remarkably short space of time it was agreed that the function of the proposed water board would be limited to developing and maintaining a hinterland scheme, and that the various municipalities would retain control over their own water works. This had the effect of averting a potential power struggle for control of the board. Apart from determining the structure of the Water Board, one of the main tasks of the Joint Water Committee [JWC] was to commission a detailed engineer's report on ten potential water schemes within and outside the peninsula.<sup>(54)</sup> Despite this apparent progress, in reality, the committee had little real authority, and was soon to fall prey to internal political developments taking place within various municipalities. Within a year of its establishment, it virtually existed in name only.

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(52) Minute of the Mayor (Cape Town) 1904; p.43.

(53) 3/CT 9/5 Minutes of Joint Water Committee. The committee comprised of Cape Town's Electricity, Waterworks and Fire Brigade Committee and a Committee of the Suburban Municipal Waterworks. The Joint Water Committee was to continue to function until 15 November 1905. It was later reconstituted as the Suburban Joint Water and Drainage Committee, which excluded the municipality of Cape Town.

(54) 3/CT 9/5, Rofe Report: Cape Peninsula Water Supply, Report presented to the Joint Water Committee, 1905.



The onset of an economic depression from about the end of 1903 formed a catalyst for a reversal in the attitude of the Cape Town city council towards the joint water scheme. Over the next few years a distinct interest group within the city council charted Cape Town on a course of economic austerity and political isolation from the suburbs. Furthermore Cape Town's water consumption slowed down and even decreased between 1904 and 1912 (see table 5 below) due to the onset of an economic depression which undermined the urgency of the proposed hinterland scheme

TABLE 5

## CAPE TOWN'S WATER CONSUMPTION 1900-1912 (GALLONS)



SOURCE: Minute of the Mayor 1900-1918

See Appendix A for full statistics

for Cape Town. In addition the period of drought that had been experienced since 1902 was at last broken and coincided with the long awaited completion of the Hely Hutchinson Dam in 1904 which brought an additional supply to the city. This rapid reversal in Cape Town's circumstances were soon to have a dramatic impact on the work of the Joint Water Committee.

The change in the economic environment had a polarising effect on

the politics of the city hall. By late 1903, leading proponents of cooperation with the suburbs, which included councillors such as John Parker, the mayor William Thorne and Frederick St Leger, the Managing Director of the Cape Times, anticipated opposition to a joint water scheme from within the town council, and urged that an enabling bill be placed before parliament for the 1904 session, even before the investigation and report of the Joint Water Committee's were complete.<sup>(55)</sup>

Opposition to the water scheme had meanwhile been emerging within the Council's Finance and Lands Committee under the leadership of Hyman Liberman, a city merchant.<sup>(56)</sup> The first tangible sign of opposition from the Finance Committee came in March 1904, when a preliminary report of the Joint Water Committee on the financing of the water scheme was rejected by the Finance Committee, which suggested that a more 'equitable apportioning of the cost' be borne by the Peninsula municipalities.<sup>(57)</sup> This was a reflection of Liberman's openly stated view that Cape Town was sacrificing its own interests by embarking on a costly water scheme with the suburbs.<sup>(58)</sup> After a division, the Finance Committee recommended, with Liberman's casting vote, that the proposed water bill which was ready to go before parliament, be withdrawn.<sup>(59)</sup> Although the latter recommendation was rejected by the mayor, William Thorne, the damage to Cape Town's relations with the suburbs had been done.

Even before the Cape Peninsula Water Supply bill reached parliament, unexpected opposition had emerged in the form of

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(55) Minute of the Mayor (Cape Town) 1904; pp.43-44.

(56) Cape Times, 24 March 1904.

(57) Minute of the Mayor (Cape Town) 1904; pp.43-44.

(58) Cape Times, 29 January 1904.

(59) Minute of the Mayor (Cape Town) 1904; pp.43-44. Also Cape Times, 24 March 1904.

petitions from ratepayers' associations and councillors from the municipalities of Woodstock and Cape Town<sup>(60)</sup> as well as Green Point and Sea Point.<sup>(61)</sup> The criticisms contained within a petition from 'Town Councillors and Ratepayers of Cape Town' reveal the extent of the divisions within city hall and between city and suburb. The Cape Town petition may be summarised as follows. Firstly it was argued that the powers to be given the proposed water board were too wide, particularly in terms of taxation. It would:

"largely increase the cost of living of the mass of the population, as ...landlords will be compelled to make their tenants pay for the rates and taxes for water".<sup>(62)</sup>

Secondly the approval of ratepayers had not been obtained from any of the municipalities concerned, and thirdly sufficient investigations had not been undertaken for the selection of a suitable scheme.<sup>(63)</sup> These were mainly economic grievances, in contrast to the petitions from the suburban municipalities which objected to the arbitrary manner in which the city council had drawn up a water bill before the completion of the Joint Water Committee's report.

One of the strongest suburban objections to the Cape Peninsula Water Supply Bill was the petition of William Hare, the mayor of Woodstock.<sup>(64)</sup> Woodstock's main objection to the bill lay in its concern that it violated the principle proposed by the JWC that the water board would be not be monopolised by either the city or

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- (60) A.7-1904, Cape of Good Hope (Colony), Report of the select committee on the Cape Peninsula Water Supply Bill.  
Petition from Charles Mathews and Fourteen Others, Appendix C; Petition of William Hare the Mayor of Woodstock, Appendix F.
  - (61) ibid. Petition of the Mayor of the Municipality of Green Point and Sea Point, Appendix B.
  - (62) A.7-1904, Appendix C, clause 3.
  - (63) A.7-1904, Appendix C, clauses 1, 8, 9, 10.
  - (64) A.7-1904, Appendix F.

suburban municipalities.<sup>(65)</sup> More specifically Woodstock objected to the haste with which Cape Town was trying to force through the bill, which it described as wholly inconsistent with the preliminary report of the Joint Water Committee<sup>(66)</sup> Hare claimed that a thorough and exhaustive investigation had not been made of the various schemes, in particular the Oliphantshoek scheme, in which Woodstock had a vested interest.

Woodstock's real concern regarding the water bill may be summarised as follows. Firstly, it feared that the Oliphantshoek scheme, in which it had already invested £20 000, would be rejected in preference to Cape Town's Berg Hoek scheme, and secondly, its interests would be overridden on the proposed water board. The question arises of why Cape Town should deviate from the principles laid down by the Joint Water Committee? Aside from the financial interest in Berg River Hoek, the most important reason is to be found in the deterioration in the position of the pro-water councillors within the city council. Leading proponents of the hinterland scheme, such as John Parker, were anxious to force through a bill establishing the city's hegemony over the suburbs before the growing number of 'anti-water' councillors achieved control over city hall.

Due to the strong opposition being mobilised against the Cape Peninsula Water Supply Bill by the suburbs, which probably would have resulted in its rejection by parliament, it was decided that the bill had best be postponed until the 1905 parliamentary session, in order to carry out further investigations in the hinterland to overcome the objections of Woodstock.<sup>(67)</sup> By the latter half of 1904 the position of the supporters of the water scheme within city hall deteriorated to such an extent that the bill was eventually abandoned altogether.

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(65) A.7-1904, Appendix F, clause 17.

(66) A.7-1904, Appendix F, clause 4.

(67) Minute of the Mayor, 1904, p.44.

In June in 1904, three anti-water councillors, William Irwin, Hyman Liberman and W.S. Woodhead<sup>(68)</sup> were appointed as representatives to the Joint Water Committee<sup>(69)</sup>, giving substance to fears that those supporting the water scheme had lost control of the council. The annual municipal elections due in September of that year threatened to become the arena for a battle for the control of the city hall between what was to become known as the water and anti-water parties within the council.

#### THE BATTLE FOR CONTROL OF THE COUNCIL: 1904-1906

The issue of water supply which dominated the municipal elections of September 1904, was to become intertwined with a wide spectrum of social, economic and political issues. Underlying Cape Town's municipal politics was the deteriorating economic climate which impacted on the creeping municipal debt. It was this situation that had led the city's ratepayers, in July 1904, to reject a loan of £ 2 000 000 for street paving, an infectious diseases hospital and for industrial dwellings.<sup>(70)</sup> The likelihood of ratepayers approving another loan of up to £2 000 000 for a new water scheme seemed increasingly unlikely. The issue of a joint hinterland scheme had also become caught up in a complex debate over the desirability of political unification between the Cape Town and the suburban municipalities. Central to this was the attempt made by certain councillors to link the issue of water supply with the proponents of municipal unification, as part of a plot devised by wealthy suburban merchants to saddle the

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(68) 3/CT 9/5, Minutes of the Joint Water Committee, 26 May, 1904

(69) *ibid.*

(70) Cape Times, 8 July 1904.

householders and working class of Cape Town with the cost of suburban civic improvement.

Cape Town's involvement with the Joint Water Committee and the hinterland scheme was brought into question during the municipal elections held in September 1904, by which time the city council had polarised into pro-water and anti-water factions. It is at this juncture that social, economic and political divisions over the issue of municipal reform and water supply that had operated during the nineteenth century were to be rekindled.

It will be remembered that during the late 1850's and early 1880's the issues of water supply, sanitation and municipal reform were at the heart of a struggle between the 'dirty' and 'clean' parties. The conflict was described as a clash of economic and class interests between householders and the landlord or rentier class against the merchants and middle classes over municipal reform and the cost of improvements to the town's sanitation system and water supply. Although the reformers gained control over the town council in 1882, by 1896 municipal indebtedness and the cost of the Table Mountain reservoirs had given rise to a confrontation between the remnants of the dirty party known as the wreckers and the clean party or reformers. While this latter conflict resembled the earlier clashes between the clean and dirty parties in the 1880's, it also marked the beginning of a new alignment, which was to develop out of the old racial and ethnic alliances into groupings with divergent economic interests. The results of this process of realignment along social and economic lines was to culminate in the defeat of the old merchant class in the 1904 municipal election.

In Chapter One it was argued that by the 1890's the political power of the rentier classes had been broken by a combination of

their relative decline within Cape Town's economy and the introduction of discriminatory municipal ordinances which narrowed the municipal franchise. The alliance of interest between working class tenants, small householders and landlords, was gradually transformed and replaced with the emergence of ratepayer's associations which shared a common concern of keeping municipal rates to a minimum. The ratepayers' association that emerged at the turn of the century coincided more closely with class lines rather than the ethnic basis of the clean and dirty parties. The ratepayers' association included sections of the middle and professional classes as well as a number of smaller businessmen. The merchant interest associated with the clean party in the 1880's was superseded by a rising class of businessmen who controlled the council by the turn of the century. The ratepayer's association, in common with the dirty party of the 1880's, drew on the support of the city's working classes, particularly where the issue of water supply was concerned, as the water schemes had become to be perceived as the prerogative of the business interest.

The emergence of this type division within the city government is not unique to Cape Town. E.P. Hennock argues that divisions within town councils in Britain in the latter half of the nineteenth century were not so much based on class conflict, but on a division amongst the dominant classes over which type of business attitude should be dominant; that of caution or enterprise.<sup>(71)</sup> Hennock argues that a central issue in municipal government was the one that took place between improvers and economists.<sup>(72)</sup> The latter, Hennock argues, rose to prominence during periods of depression, and were often supported by ignorant electors who worked against reform.<sup>(73)</sup> In Cape Town a

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(71) E.P. Hennock, Fit and Proper Persons, p.317.

(72) *ibid.*

(73) *ibid.*

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similar process may be discerned but is complicated by the existence of racial divisions.

That the issue of augmenting water supply became the focus of a conflict between improvers and economists was also not unique to Cape Town. The conflict over Liverpool's Rivington Pike Scheme,<sup>(74)</sup> which was discussed in the introductory chapter,<sup>(75)</sup> represented a division between "wealthy merchants and professional men" against "shopkeepers and tradesmen" on the basis that it would result in an increase in rates.<sup>(76)</sup> A familiar pattern of conflict was to occur in Cape Town, although the divisions along class lines within the council were not as pronounced.

The ascendancy of men in the town council who were opposed to excessive expenditure on civic improvements, and even more so to municipal debt, is apparent from the municipal elections from 1897 onwards, which saw a minority of candidates calling for "efficiency and economy", "no fresh taxation" <sup>(77)</sup> and for "reform and reorganization in the town house".<sup>(78)</sup> Similarly pleas were made for:

"ratepayers to be cognizant of all the business matters and expenditure, [and for] the finances of the city, loans and otherwise, to be carefully controlled, and no squandering of ratepayer's money." <sup>(79)</sup>

The election of a handful of proponents of efficiency and economy at the turn of the century, led by Hyman Liberman,<sup>(80)</sup>

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(74) D.Fraser, Power and Authority in the Victorian City, 1979, p.33.

(75) See Introduction, pp.18-19.

(76) D. Fraser, Power and Authority, p.35.

(77) Cape Times, 13 September 1897.

(78) Cape Times, 10 September 1897.

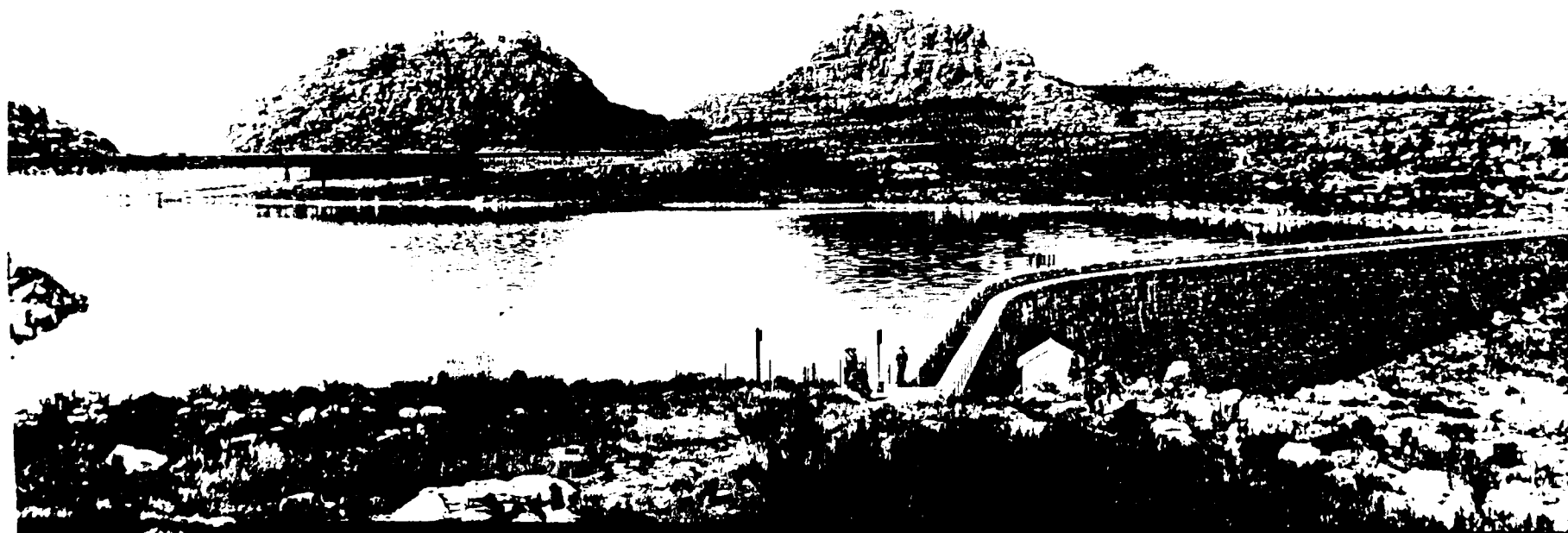
(79) *ibid.*

(80) See biography, Appendix A.



PHOTOGRAPH 7

The Hely Hutchinson Dam c.1905



Cape Archives : AG I4220

and including; G.Pittman; G.Cunningham, T.Harris, and A.Hilliard<sup>(81)</sup> were to capitalise further on the popular perception of the business classes serving their own interests on the council.<sup>(82)</sup> In particular the perception of the city council's incessant preoccupation with a hinterland water scheme resulted in it being at the centre of the focus of general public resentment against municipal improvement.

The divisions that were to develop in the council were not absolute, as alliances shifted from time to time.<sup>(83)</sup> Even amongst the anti-water party there were differences of emphasis. One group maintained that there was no necessity for an increase in water supply at all,<sup>(84)</sup> a second smaller group argued that Table Mountain would be an adequate source for all future needs, while a third section represented by Liberman argued that Cape Town would sacrifice its own economic interests by cooperating with the suburbs.<sup>(85)</sup>

The opening of the Hely Hutchinson dam in 1904, (see photograph 7 facing page) slow down in Cape Town's water consumption and the ending of the drought, combined with the ending of the economic boom and municipality's massive debt, provided an ideal opportunity for a challenge against the established municipal order in the elections of that year.

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(81) George Cunningham was a baker and confectioner; Alfred Hilliard was a draper; T.Harris was an auctioneer and broker.

(82) V. Bickford-Smith; " Keeping Your Own Council", pp.201-204. A.R McKenzie; W.Thorne; and Garlick are given as examples of councillors serving their own interests.

(83) T.J O'Reilly; G. Cunningham; and C. Mathews are three examples of councillors that were to shift their position on the water issue, for expedience or change of conviction. Some merchants like R. Stuttaford and Sir Frederick Smith tended to keep a low profile on the issue of water supply.

(84) Cape Times, 29 January 1904.

(85) *ibid.*

PHOTOGRAPH 7

John Parker



The September election saw twelve candidates competing for six vacancies within the city council. Of these, six candidates stood on a water ticket against five on an anti-water ticket. The former was headed by John Parker,<sup>(86)</sup> who was a prominent supporter of municipal unification, as well as a council representative of the Joint Water Committee and a leading supporter of the hinterland water scheme. (see photograph 6 facing page) Parker had wide experience and contact with the peninsula municipalities, having been previously elected as a councillor in Mowbray municipality in 1898.<sup>(87)</sup> This background was to lead to accusations that he was representative of the suburban interest. The remaining members of the ticket were all city businessmen: William Baxter; James Clunie; Andrew McKenzie; James Wyllie and David Robertson.<sup>(88)</sup>

By comparison the five members of the anti-water ticket tended to be drawn from the ranks of the smaller shopkeepers and businessmen as well as members of the professional classes. These included Charles Friedlander, an attorney; two drapers, Alfred Hilliard and Edward von Witt;<sup>(89)</sup> Samuel Impey, a medical doctor and District Six landlord<sup>(90)</sup>; and Edward Mellish, a shipping agent.<sup>(91)</sup> An independent candidate, Dr. Abdullah Abdurahman also supported the stand of the anti-water ticket. The fact that two medical doctors took an anti-water stance is a

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(86) See Appendix for biography.

(87) Dictionary of South African Biography, Volume 5, 1987.

(88) Minute of the Mayor, (Cape Town) 1905 and Longlands Cape Town and Peninsula Directory, 1903. William Duncan-Baxter was one of the leading merchants in the city and founder member of the South African Political Association; James Clunie (Captain) was a shipping merchant; Andrew McKenzie was a forwarding agent; James Wyllie was a sanitary engineer and hardware importer.

(89) Minute of the Mayor, (Cape Town) 1905.

(90) South African News, 9 September 1904. Impey describes himself as "a large property owner in District Six".

(91) Minute of the Mayor, (Cape Town) 1905

reflection of the nature of the conflict. Unlike the earlier conflicts of the 1850's and 1880's in which the dominant issue was sanitation and reform, the municipal elections between 1904 and 1906 concerned economic issues. The conflict within the city council centred on Cape Town's relationship with the suburban municipalities, of which the issue of a hinterland water scheme was the linchpin. Larger businessmen wanted Cape Town to play a dominant role in the development of the peninsula's infrastructure, while smaller businessmen and householders were unwilling to pay its cost, and felt that the city should detach itself from the suburban water and sanitation problem.

A better understanding of the nature of the divisions that emerged within the dominant class may be determined from the difference in the backgrounds and occupations of the candidates from the two water tickets. Although significant distinctions cannot be made from the 1904 election alone, when compared to the representatives and candidates of similar water tickets in the 1905 and 1906 elections, a clear pattern emerges. (see table 6 page 134) While the supporters of water party tended to be identified with the business elite, labelled the "Adderley Street interest",<sup>(93)</sup> because of their activity in the central city, the majority of these men actually lived in the southern suburbs.(53%) The anti-water party by contrast, tended to be represented by smaller businessmen and the professional classes, the overwhelming majority of whom resided within Cape Town and Green Point's municipal boundaries.(94%) (see table 6 overleaf) This difference gave substance to accusations made against the water party that it represented the suburbs, and seriously undermined its strength in the city council.

Further distinctions may be made between the two parties on the basis of the composition of their supporters. The support for

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(93) Most large business was situated on Adderley Street. Sometimes referred to as the Adderley and St. Georges Street clique.

TABLE 6

COMPARISON OF THE PLACE OF RESIDENCE AND OCCUPATIONS OF  
CANDIDATES OF THE WATER-PARTY AND ANTI-WATER PARTY IN MUNICIPAL  
ELECTIONS FROM 1904-1906.

<u>ANTI-WATER PARTY</u>			
NAME	PLACE OF RESIDENCE	OCCUPATION	YEAR
Abdurahaman, Abdullah	Cape Town	medical doctor	1904
Alexander, Morris	?	barrister	1905
Allan, Robert	Wynberg	merchant	1906
Black, William	Green Point	architect	1906
Cunningham, George	Cape Town	baker	1904
Dunn, Joseph	Sea Point	merchant	1905
Forsyth, Robert	Sea Point	medical doctor	1905
Friedlander, Charles	Cape Town	attorney	1904
Harris, Thomas	Cape Town	auctioneer	1904
Hilliard, Alfred	Cape Town	draper	1904
Impey, Samuel	Cape Town	medical doctor	1904
Irwin, William	Sea Point	importer	1906
Jones, James	Cape Town	chemist	1905
Kinsley, Charles	Cape Town	law agent	1905
Lieberman, Hyman	Cape Town	merchant	1906
Mellish, Edward	Cape Town	shipping agent	1904
Palmer, Thomas	Sea Point	importer	1906
Smith, Frederick B.	Cape Town	builder	1906
Von Witt, Edward	Cape Town	draper	1904
<u>WATER PARTY</u>			
Ball, Thomas	Rondebosch	property owner	1906
Bartlett, John	Cape Town	builder	1904
Baxter, William Duncan	Wynberg	merchant	1904
Bosman, Petrus	Cape Town	wine merchant	1905
Bullen, William	Rondebosch	insurance agent	1906
Clunie, James	Cape Town	merchant	1904
Drake, John	Rosebank	builder	1905
Mathews, Charles	Green Point	property owner	1905/6
McKenzie, Andrew	Cape Town	merchant	1904
O'Reilly, T.J.	Cape Town	agent at law	1904
Parker, John	Rosebank	architect	1904/5
Sedgwick, Charles	Rondebosch	merchant	1906
St Leger, Frederick	Claremont	M.D. Cape Times	1906
Thorne, Sir William	Rondebosch	merchant	1905
Walshe, Albert	?	chemist	1906
Wyllie, James	Cape Town	merchant/ sanitary engineer	1904

NO CLEAR ALLEGIANCE TO EITHER PARTY

Smith, Frederick(sir)	Cape Town	merchant	1905
Stuttaford, Richard	Kenilworth	merchant	1905

SOURCES: Minute of the Mayor 1904-1906; The Cape Times; The Owl; The Cape Argus.

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the two tickets was generally drawn from different groups of ratepayers. Support for the water ticket tended to come from businessmen and professional classes, broadly coinciding with the upper and middle class ratepayers, while the following of the anti-water ticket was strongest amongst middle and lower middle class householders, artisans and the working class. It was this latter group that had been hardest hit by the growing municipal debt through the consequent increase in rates and rents. Although the representatives of the anti-water ticket were hardly typical of the working class, they attracted the latter's support with their accusations of municipal extravagance and rhetoric denouncing corruption and self interest. For example Samuel Impey reminded ratepayers that:

"The councillors had always been mainly elected from the neighbourhood of Adderley Street. [and that] He was a large property owner in District 6 and would work for the benefit of the district." (94)

Much of the anti-water party's campaign was popularist in character, particularly with regard to water supply, and as such, the Berg River Scheme represented a convenient symbol of municipal extravagance. The working classes needed little reminding, as their negative perception of the water supply issue was embedded in their consciousness; they had been casualties of the rivalry between landlords and merchants over sanitation and municipal reform during the nineteenth century. The Cape Times was to remind supporters of the water party not to allow Cape Town to "revert to the state of things which existed in the seventies and the eighties, when the dirty people had the controlling voice in municipal affairs" (95). Furthermore the Cape Times made an attempt to revive the old ethnic and racial divisions which had operated around the issue of municipal reform with the accusation of an "alliance of sectionalism" which it

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(94) Cape Times, 9 September 1904.

(95) Cape Times, 28 March 1904.

THE OWL 9 September 1904



Parker, Clunie, Wyllie, Robertson, McKeuzie and Duncan, known as the Blue Water Ticket, have made up their minds to swim or sink together in their attempt to reach the local many Hall or Town House."

THE BLUE WATER TICKET



leveled at the anti-water party. It complained bitterly that the city voted against any water scheme because "Mr. Liberman and Dr. Abdurahman gave the word", and as a result the "coloured vote as he bids them".<sup>(96)</sup> Liberman's response was to these attacks were blunt:

"Nothing could be more undesirable than that the conduct of civic affairs should fall into the hands of a faction swayed by nothing so much as a determination to secure power by any means, and to retain it at all costs."<sup>(97)</sup>

For the anti-water party the issue of water supply was a manifestation of a seemingly unstoppable municipal expenditure and debt. This perception is best illustrated by a cartoon appearing in the satirical journal, The Owl (see cartoon 7 facing page) in which the water ticket is shown to be afloat on a sea of indebtedness.

The September poll resulted in an decisive defeat of the water ticket and even the "water prophet" John Parker, who bore the brunt of the attack, was rejected by the ratepayers. Only William Duncan Baxter and Andrew McKenzie narrowly managed to be returned to the city hall.<sup>(98)</sup> The Cape Times lamented:

"we had hoped that the municipal elections would result in a triumph for water. As a matter of fact, the poll is,...a victory for mud."<sup>(99)</sup>

The victory of the anti-water ticket held serious implications for the reformers within city hall as the balance of power shifted decisively in favour of the anti-water party led by Hymen Liberman. Liberman himself had been elected on to the council in 1903, and as a wealthy merchant was conspicuous amongst the smaller businessmen and shopkeepers of the anti-water party. The

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(96) Cape Times, 8 September 1904. Also see W.Duncan-Baxter, Turn Back the Pages, pp.40-41.

(97) Cape Times, 23 September 1904.

(98) Cape Times, 13 September 1904.

(99) Cape Times, 14 September 1904.

# KING OF THE CASTLE



At the first meeting of the new Town Council the anti-Berg Riverites carried a motion by 10 to 5 stopping all further expenditure on the Berg River water scheme & commanding the Council to cancel all of all expenditure to date.

party's control over the town council was reinforced with Liberman's election as mayor after the poll; an office he was to hold for three years. While Parker was to stand for re-election in 1905, his attention turned to what he considered to be the key to the Cape Peninsula's water problem: the need for the political unification of the city and suburban municipalities.<sup>(100)</sup>

The anti-water party quickly stamped its authority on the town council. Within a week of the election, in a motion carried by ten votes against seven, it overturned a previous decision to grant £5000 to the Joint Water Committee to undertake further investigation of sites in the hinterland.<sup>(101)</sup> A cartoon in The Owl which depicted Liberman as the new "King of the Castle" made it clear that this decision was a major step in ridding Cape Town of the burden of debt. ( see cartoon 7 facing page ) Cape Town's independent investigations being conducted by the British Engineer John Rofe,<sup>(102)</sup> were however allowed to continue.

The council's rejection of all further expenditure on a hinterland scheme had a devastating impact on the city's relationship with the suburbs, and signaled Cape Town's retreat into a period of political isolation. In reaction to the withdrawal of Cape Town's funding of the Joint water Committee, the suburban municipalities reciprocated by demanding that the city transfer to them the rights, title and interest in the Berg River Scheme at cost price.<sup>(103)</sup> This was refused by Cape Town which also announced that it would no longer participate in any

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(100) This was to culminate in the formation of the Peninsula Unification Society which he founded in 1910.

(101) Minute of the Mayor, 1905, p.87.

(102) The report was completed in 1905 but ignored by the council. H.Rofe; Cape Peninsula Water Supply: Report Presented to the Joint Water Committee, 1905.

(103) Minute of the Mayor, (Cape Town), 1905, p.87.

joint scheme. Cape Town's rejection of further cooperation did not mean that the city had no future intention of developing a hinterland scheme, for the anti-water party's underlying objection to a joint scheme had been based on the uneven cost that Cape Town was expected to bear, at a time when the city's water requirements were declining. Despite this attitude, the party was not unaware of the enormous profit that the waterworks brought the city. For this reason it was not prepared to abandon its interests at Berg River Hoek which would open the way for an independent suburban scheme to break the lucrative monopoly which it held over the Peninsula's water catchment areas.

While water consumption in Cape Town had been falling since 1904, the opposite was true in the suburbs. Woodstock in particular had been suffering from severe water shortages and had been purchasing up to 150 000 gallons per day from Cape Town.<sup>(104)</sup> This figure excluded water supplied by Cape Town directly to the tanneries and breweries within the municipality.<sup>(105)</sup> By 1905 the situation in Woodstock had deteriorated to such an extent that it was forced to cart water to the hospital and other areas that could not be supplied due to low water pressure, at a cost of 1½d. a gallon to its town council.<sup>(106)</sup> Similarly, during the summer of 1905 the SMWB was forced to purchase 10 000 gallons a day from Cape Town in order to make up a shortfall in its supply.<sup>(107)</sup> For these reasons Woodstock once again began to consider seriously a hinterland scheme of its own, and in June 1905 it began to prepare a bill to take before parliament for authority to initiate an independent scheme.<sup>(108)</sup> The reaction

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(104) Minute of the Mayor, (Cape Town), 1905, p.91.

(105) Minute of the Mayor, (Cape Town), 1905, Annual report of the Water Engineer, Appendix 4.

(106) A.7-1906, Cape of Good Hope (Colony), Report of the select committee on the Cape Peninsula Water Supply Bill, p.3, Evidence of Andrew Cunningham. (Mayor of Woodstock)

(107) Minute of the Mayor, (Cape Town), 1905, p.91.

(108) Cape Times, 5 June 1905.

PHOTOGRAPH 8  
FLOODS IN CAPE TOWN 1905



of the other peninsula municipalities to Woodstock's revival of its Oliphantshoek scheme were at first somewhat muted, attempts were made to urge Cape Town to cooperate with the suburbs.

In August 1905, T.A. Askew, the mayor of Claremont, approached Cape Town to persuade it to revive the joint hinterland scheme. Failing that, it was requested that the suburbs be allowed to take over Cape Town's interests in the scheme at cost.<sup>(109)</sup> Pressure was also put on the city council with the publication of the 'Rofe Report', which had been commissioned by the Joint Water Committee in 1904, which was to urge strongly the commencement of a combined hinterland scheme.<sup>(110)</sup>

Despite the overtures being made by the suburbs, and the annual municipal elections due in September 1905, the water party made only a token attempt to persuade ratepayers of the need to cooperate with the Joint Water Committee. In the aftermath of its decisive defeat in 1904, the issue of water supply was given less prominence during the 1905 election, for fear of a further weakening of its position within the city council. Earlier in that year Parker had declined to stand in a by-election caused by the death of councillor Mellish, despite the urging of the Cape Times to do so.<sup>(111)</sup> The anti-water party's opposition to the Berg River scheme had been symbolically vindicated by the flooding of the peninsula by violent storms and record rainfalls during June of that year. (see photograph 9 facing page) <sup>(112)</sup>

Amongst the candidates nominated for the six vacancies in the 1905 election only four supported the water party. Aside from

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(109) Minute of the Mayor, 1905, pp.87-88.

(110) The Owl, 11 August 1905.

(111) *ibid.*

(112) L. Green, Grow Lovely, Growing Old, 1975, pp.167-68.

Parker, who was now prepared to stand<sup>(113)</sup> these included a leading merchant and former mayor, Sir William Thorne; another sitting councillor and property owner Petrus Bosman; and a builder John Drake, who had the backing of the Master Builders Association.<sup>(114)</sup> Of the six candidates endorsed by the ratepayers association, four were linked with the anti-water party, including James Jones, a chemist; a medical doctor, Robert Forsyth; Charles Kinsley, a 'law agent'; and a shopkeeper, Joseph Dunn.<sup>(115)</sup> The remaining candidates, two merchants, Richard Stuttaford and Frederick Smith were unaligned, and received support from both parties.<sup>(116)</sup> The position taken by anti-water party supporters was that no further expenditure on the Berg River Scheme be permitted<sup>(117)</sup> and that the city sell off its assets in the hinterland to the suburbs at cost price, on condition that Cape Town retained the right to rejoin the scheme at a future date.<sup>(118)</sup> Given the poor economic situation and lack of support for the Berg River scheme, Parker resisted being drawn into an emotive and potentially debilitating campaign, like that of 1904.

The water party's low key approach had some limited success, and surprisingly, John Parker was elected with the third highest

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(113) Another reason Parker had declined to stand in the earlier by-election was that if he had been elected he would have to stand again in the following year due to the municipal system of three yearly rotational elections. By standing as part of a ticket annual elections, the chances of election were increased.

(114) Minute of the Mayor, 1906; and Cape Times, 1 September 1905.

(115) Minute of the Mayor, 1906; and The Owl, 25 August 1905.

(116) Cape Times, 9 September 1905.

(117) Cape Times, 25 August 1905.

(118) *ibid.*

number of votes.<sup>(119)</sup> The only other water party supporter who was successful was the popular former mayor, Sir William Thorne<sup>(120)</sup> who was re-elected. Parker's success may be largely attributed to his espousal of "socialist" reforms,<sup>(121)</sup> a strategy which earned him the wrath of The Owl.<sup>(122)</sup> Parker's unexpected victory was explained as the result of a "large number of plumpers"<sup>(123)</sup> and by a "series of tactical electioneering operations" which drew a combination of support from:

"the pulpit, by the suburbanites who want a water scheme,...by the Trades Hall, and by the injudicious, partisan organ, the Cape Times".<sup>(124)</sup>

The Owl went on to deny that his advocacy of the Berg River scheme had been approved by the ratepayers, and accused him of underhand methods of gaining the "labour vote"[working class] through his support of industrial dwellings for artisans.<sup>(125)</sup>

The balance of power in the town council remained in favour of the anti-water party, with Forsyth and Jones being elected, along with the two unaligned candidates.<sup>(126)</sup> The influence of the water party was still felt through its domination of city

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(119) The Owl, 15 September 1905. Sir Frederick Smith came first, followed by Stuttaford and Parker. Dr. Forsyth was elected in fourth place, followed by Sir William Thorne and J. Jones.

(120) Cape Times, 9 September.

(121) The Owl, 15 September 1905. The biography of Parker contained in the Dictionary of South African Biography, op.cit., refers to him being re-elected in 1905 as a socialist, appealing to the working man. However Parker was not a socialist in the modern sense of the word, but rather a supporter of municipal socialism. It is however unlikely that he received significant support from workers, as it has been argued, most were drawn to the anti-water party.

(122) The Owl, 15 September 1905. It is of interest to note that The Owl, which was strongly against the hinterland scheme, was published by the Cape Times. This contradiction must be explained by strongly independent editorial control.

(123) The Owl, 15 September 1905.

(124) *ibid*.

(125) *ibid*.

(126) Cape Times, 11 September 1905.



council's Electric, Waterworks and Fire brigade Committee. The supporters of the anti-water party were concentrated in the Finance Committee, in which the real power of the council lay. ( see table 7 below)

TABLE 7

SUPPORTERS OF THE WATER-PARTY AND ANTI-WATER PARTY CONCENTRATION  
IN THE CITY COUNCIL'S WATERWORKS AND FINANCE COMMITTEES:  
1903-1906

WATERWORKS COMMITTEE	1903/04	FINANCE COMMITTEE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* W. Thorne (mayor)</li> <li>* P.J. Bosman</li> <li>■ T. Harris</li> <li>* J. Parker</li> <li>* G. Cunningham</li> <li>* T.J. O' Reilly</li> <li>* D. Robertson</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* W. Thorne (mayor)</li> <li>* P.J. Bosman</li> <li>■ W. Irwin</li> <li>* F.L. St Leger</li> <li>Dr. Fuller</li> <li>■ H. Liberman</li> <li>* W.S. Woodhead</li> </ul>
	1904/1905	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ H. Liberman (mayor)</li> <li>* J. Bartlett</li> <li>■ G. Cunningham</li> <li>■ D. Mellish</li> <li>* W.D. Baxter</li> <li>■ A. Hilliard</li> <li>* W. Thorne</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ H. Liberman (mayor)</li> <li>■ W. Irwin</li> <li>* F. L. St Leger</li> <li>■ C. Friedlander</li> <li>* C. Mathews</li> <li>* P.J. Bosman</li> <li>* W. Thorne</li> </ul>
	1905/1906	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ H. Liberman (mayor)</li> <li>* W.D. Baxter</li> <li>* T.J. O' Reilly</li> <li>F.W. Smith</li> <li>■ J. Jones</li> <li>* J. Parker</li> <li>* W. Thorne</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ H. Liberman (mayor)</li> <li>* W.D. Baxter</li> <li>■ F.B. Smith</li> <li>R. Stuttaford</li> <li>■ C. Friedlander</li> <li>* F.L. St Leger</li> <li>* W. Thorne</li> </ul>
	1906/1907	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ H. Liberman</li> <li>■ A. Abdurahman</li> <li>■ R. Allan</li> <li>■ M. Allexander</li> <li>■ W. Irwin</li> <li>F.W. Smith</li> <li>■ T. Palmer</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ H. Liberman (mayor)</li> <li>■ R. Allan</li> <li>■ W. Irwin</li> <li>■ T. Palmer</li> <li>■ C. Friedlander</li> <li>■ F.B. Smith</li> <li>* W. Thorne</li> </ul>

## KEY

- \* Pro-water councillors
- Anti-water councillors

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NOTE: F.W. Smith and R. Stuttaford held no clear allegiance to either party. G. Cunningham switched from supporting the water party to the anti-water party in 1904.

SOURCES: Minute of the Mayor, 1904-1907; The Cape Times  
The Owl; The Cape Argus.

Although councillors who advocated economy and efficiency extended their control over the city council in the 1904 and 1905 elections by directing public attention against the Berg River scheme, they proved to be reluctant to allow the suburbs to proceed with their own hinterland scheme. It has been argued that Liberman was not opposed to augmenting Cape Town's water supply, but to the fact that the city would have to bear the bulk of the cost in any joint scheme. The anti-water party suspected that the suburbs did not have the financial ability to proceed with a scheme alone, and were content to allow the suburbs to wait until such time as Cape Town was prepared to rejoin them on its own terms. This assumption was to be challenged in the period following the 1905 election, when it appeared as if Woodstock might just succeed in initiating a scheme and upsetting Cape Town's monopoly of water supply.

The belief that the suburbs did not have the ability to finance an independent water scheme seemed to be vindicated with the dissolution of the Joint Water Committee in November 1905.<sup>(127)</sup> Its chairman, John Parker, expressed the fear that the whole issue might soon be taken out of the hands of the local authorities. In his final report Parker warned of the:

"danger of the whole question becoming so beset with local jealousies or interests, that the Government might be compelled to take the matter up, and create a board with full powers to carry out a scheme...."<sup>(128)</sup>

The breakup of the Joint Water Committee did not bring an end to the suburban effort. On the 14th of December 1905 a new body, the Suburban Joint Water and Drainage Committee, [SJWDC] was formed, which was comprised solely of the four members of the Suburban Municipal Waterworks.<sup>(129)</sup> In February 1906 the

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(127) 3/CT 9/5, Minutes of the Joint Water Committee, 15 November 1905, p.2-4. Resume of proceedings of the Joint Water Committee.

(128) *ibid.*, p.3.

(129) 3/CT 9/5, Report of the Suburban Joint Water and Drainage Committee, 28 February 1907.

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municipalities of the SJWDC announced their intention to promote an enabling bill for a hinterland water scheme at Wemmershoek. (130)

Woodstock was serious in its attempt to develop a scheme, but Rondebosch, Mowbray and Claremont never ceased to try to enlist the economic support of Cape Town for the SJWDC. If Cape Town refused to cooperate, Woodstock had made it clear that it would be forced to go it alone out of sheer necessity. (131) At a joint meeting held between Cape Town's combined Water and Finance Committee and the Suburban Joint Water and Drainage Committee, (132) the suburbs again made an attempt to persuade the the city either to participate directly or to purchase 600 000 gallons of water per day at 1s.2d. per 1000 gallons as an indirect means of financing the project. (133) Due to ongoing conflict between the city council's Finance and Water Committees, Cape Town's response was equivocal as was its unwillingness to make any concessions until further investigation of sites were undertaken. At a second meeting held by the city and SJWDC, the patience of Woodstock was finally broken when its mayor, Andrew Cunningham, made it clear that his municipality was ready to proceed with Wemmershoek "at all costs" and was not prepared to cooperate in any other scheme. (134)

Faced with the very real likelihood of a SJWDC scheme at Wemmershoek, Cape Town's combined Finance and Water Committee reached a compromise and in May 1906 they advised the city council that the principle of a joint scheme was the most effective way of meeting the city's long term water needs. The

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(130) A.7-1906, Cape of Good Hope(Colony), Report of the select committee on the Cape Peninsula Water Supply bill.

(131) Minute of the Mayor, 1906, p.85.

(132) Minute of the Mayor, 1906, p.84.

(133) ibid.

(134) ibid., p.85.

report noted that they considered the financial terms offered by the suburbs was in commensurate with the amount of water that Cape Town would receive from the scheme.<sup>(135)</sup> The combined committee also questioned the scale and cost of the Wemmershoek scheme. Given the unfavourable economic climate, it suggested that if Cape Town was to cooperate with the suburbs, further sites should be investigated and the final choice of a site should be decided by an independent arbiter.<sup>(136)</sup> Furthermore, the committee recommended that Cape Town should bear no more than a quarter of the cost of a joint project, as this was equivalent to the amount of water that the city was estimated to need for the next twenty-five years.<sup>(137)</sup>

This apparent shift in the attitude of Cape Town following the 1905 municipal election, towards one of conditional cooperation with the suburbs might have been based on Parker's influence on the city council's water committee, but in reality these harsh conditions reflected the anti-water party's control over the finance committee. In effect the anti-water party believed that if the suburbs could not bring themselves to accept conditions favourable to Cape Town, they probably could not proceed on their own.

Woodstock was in no mood for further negotiation over the site of a scheme or its finance, and on its own initiative proceeded to place before parliament its Cape Peninsula Water Supply Bill which provided for a smaller scheme at a cost of £1 000 000.<sup>(138)</sup> In its overhasty attempt to overcome the impasse created by Cape Town, Woodstock only succeeded in unleashing a storm of protest amongst the suburban municipalities. Cape Town also objected to

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(135) Minute of the Mayor, 1906, pp.86-88.

(136) Minute of the Mayor, 1906, p.87.

(137) *ibid.*

(138) A.7-1906, p.1.

the bill, but the most devastating opposition came from ratepayers in Rondebosch, Claremont, Mowbray and even from Woodstock itself. By July 1906 Woodstock's Wemmershoek scheme lay in tatters.

Cape Town's real objection to the Cape Peninsula Water Supply Bill was its concern that Woodstock had been attempting to raise alternative finance for its Wemmershoek scheme by offering a substantially reduced water tariff to the Table Bay Harbour Board. With Cape Town's 1903 agreement with the government due to lapse,<sup>(139)</sup> suspicions had arisen when Woodstock succeeded in persuading the railway and harbour authorities to abandon renewed investigations into constructing their own water scheme.<sup>(140)</sup>

The most damaging opposition to the Cape Peninsula Water Supply Bill came from suburban ratepayers. This had arisen as a result of the undue haste with which Woodstock had unilaterally pushed for the Wemmershoek scheme in preference to other potentially superior schemes. It was done before the completion of an engineer's investigation which had been commissioned by the Suburban Joint Water and Drainage Committee.<sup>(141)</sup> The strongest suburban reaction came from Thomas Ball<sup>(142)</sup>, the Mayor of Rondebosch, who protested that:

"the [Wemmershoek] scheme has never been definitely approved by the [Suburban] Joint Committee. There has never been a report drawn up approving of that and submitted to our councils....It has been forced through"

Although Rondebosch had its own reasons for opposing the Wemmershoek site, because it owned land and options in the

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(139) Cape Times, 6 March 1905.

(140) A.7-1906, p.13.

(141) A.7-1906, p.314.

(142) *ibid.*

Steenbras river valley, Ball's criticism echoed those of other municipalities who now suspected that Woodstock, like Cape Town in 1903, was attempting to create a monopoly of supply in the hinterland.

A question that arises is why Woodstock should jeopardise its ambitions in the hinterland by antagonising Cape Town and its erstwhile suburban partners. Firstly, Woodstock rejected Cape Town's demand that it should only contribute a quarter of the costs of a scheme, which the former saw as a delaying tactic intended to buy time for a scheme of their own.<sup>(143)</sup> Secondly, the fact that the city's ratepayers had rejected the Berg River Scheme only two years previously, meant that there would be no guarantee that they would now approve a loan for a scheme perceived to be for the benefit of the suburbs. Thirdly, Woodstock had come to realise that without the support of Cape Town, the rest of the suburban municipalities would be reluctant to attempt a scheme on their own. A fourth reason was that amongst the suburbs, it was Woodstock that was under the greatest pressure to augment its water supply, and it was this which was to prompt it to attempt a smaller scheme in the hope that the suburbs would follow its lead. Finally, Woodstock owned large areas of land in the Wemmershoek valley and had undertaken extensive scientific and engineering investigations at its own expense.<sup>(144)</sup> But in its haste to occupy the vacuum caused by Cape Town's vacillation over its role in the hinterland, Woodstock had suddenly found itself isolated from the rest of the suburbs. As a result of this misjudgment, its ability to proceed on its own with a £1 000 000 water scheme was seriously questioned. Ultimately, the widespread opposition to Woodstock's Wemmershoek Bill was to cause it to be withdrawn.

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(143) A.7-1906, p.27.

(144) A.7-1906, p.34.



"Water, Water everywhere nor any drop to drink."

The Cape Peninsula Water Supply Bill also had repercussions within the city council. Cape Town's reconsideration of a joint hinterland scheme rekindled the conflict between the water and anti-water parties. These were to manifest themselves during the municipal elections of 1906, the third year in succession in which water supply had a central role. The water party saw the collapse of the initiative between the city and suburbs as an opportunity to go on the offensive against the anti-water party. The negotiations that had taken place between the city and the suburbs at the end of 1905 and early 1906 had raised Parker's hopes over the prospect of reviving a joint scheme. The collapse of Woodstock's Water Supply Bill in July 1906 drew attention to the need for a fresh initiative on the part of the pro-water city councillors by renewing negotiations and offering more equitable terms to the suburbs for a hinterland scheme but the election resulted in a major setback for the water party, and the abandonment of Cape Town's hinterland interests.

For the ratepayers of Cape Town, the debate over water supply had by now become largely academic, as a hinterland scheme was not of immediate concern when the city's reservoirs were filled to capacity. Another Qwl cartoon, "The Great Thirstland", makes this point with Parker trying to catch the rain while water is seen to flow to waste everywhere. ( see cartoon 8 facing page )

Once again, the lines of conflict were drawn, with the ratepayers association backing Liberman's platform of economy and the water party fielding a strong candidate in William Duncan Baxter.<sup>(145)</sup> The latter's concern lay in large scale civic improvement for the long term development of the city as well as close cooperation with the suburbs.

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(145) See biography, Appendix A.



PHOTOGRAPH 9

WILLIAM DUNCAN-BAXTER



MINUTE OF THE MAYOR 1908

After the progressive weakening of the Adderley street interest in the two previous municipal elections, businessmen such as Baxter began to regroup in order to wrest control of the council from the influence of Liberman, the anti-water party and the householder dominated ratepayers' association. A clear indication of a concerted mobilisation of businessmen is reflected in the formation of The Citizens' Guild in February 1906. The Guild's primary objective was to re-assert and maintain the interests of the business in the city hall. The Guild, which was led by William Duncan Baxter, (see photograph 10 opposite page) was supported by leading businessmen such as Richard Stuttaford; John Garlick and Cleghorn.<sup>(146)</sup> Baxter was strongly supported by the recently appointed editor of the Cape Times, Maitland Park,<sup>(147)</sup> who felt that a "new regime" was needed at the City Hall, and set about this objective in an aggressive manner.<sup>(148)</sup> Such was the response of Cape Town's leading citizens to its formation, that the Cape Times was led to remark optimistically: "if this tendency is carefully fostered, most of the defects of popular control of the affairs of the city may be expected to disappear".<sup>(149)</sup> The stated aims of the Guild thinly disguised its real objectives. These were:

- " (a) To secure the systematic registration of all persons qualified to vote at municipal elections.
- (b) To induce suitable candidates to accept nomination for seats upon the council
- (c) To consider municipal policy and affairs and disseminate reliable information thereon.
- (d) Generally to create a greater interest in municipal affairs, and to assist in the furtherance of projects that may be to the advantage of the city and its inhabitants."<sup>(150)</sup>

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(146) Cape Times, 18 July 1906.

(147) G. Shaw, Some beginnings: The Cape Times 1876-1910, 1975, p.135.

(148) *ibid.*

(149) Cape Times, 18 July 1906.

(150) Cape Times, 17 February 1906.

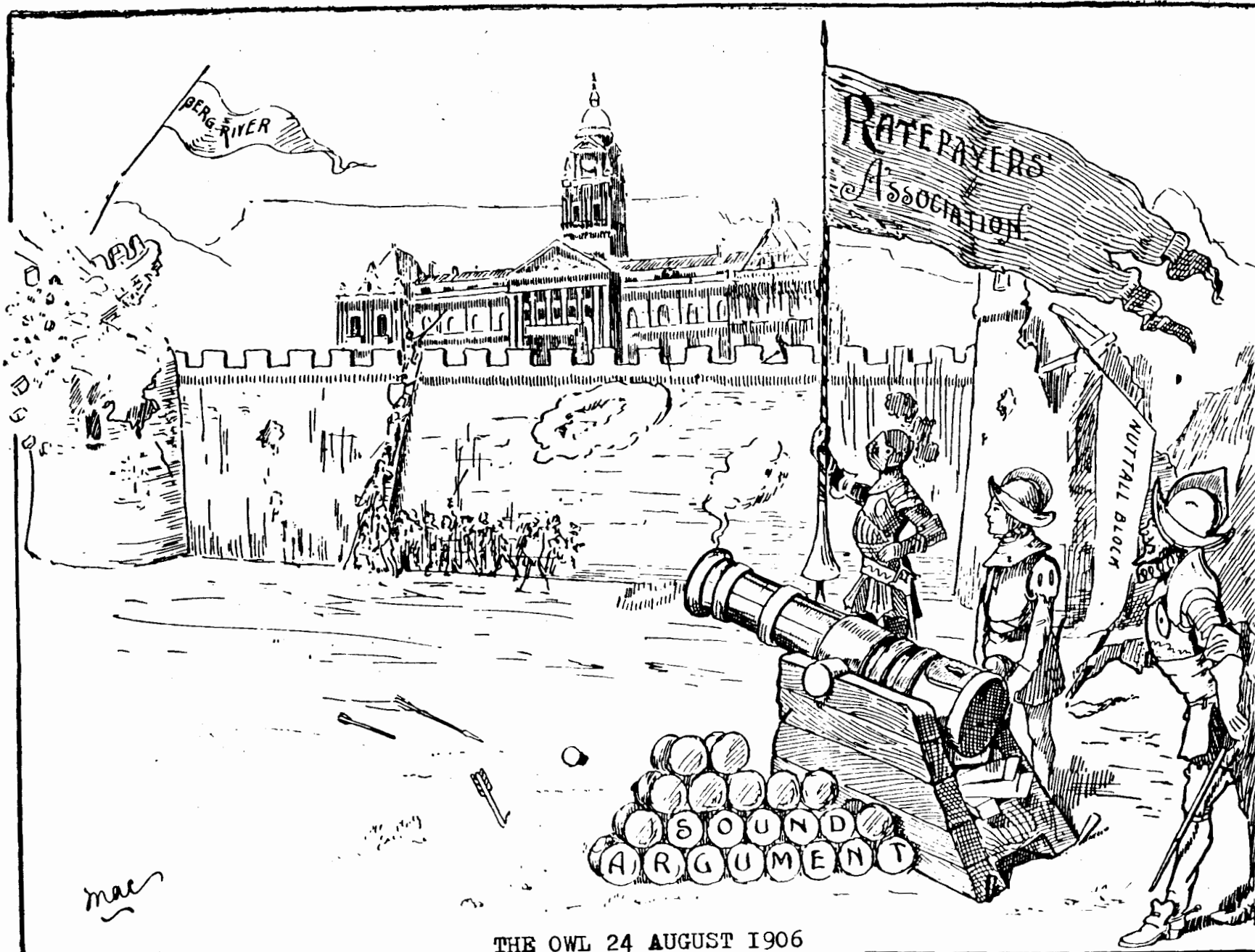
These points reflect the Guild's view of the decline of the merchant interest in the city hall since their defeat of the dirty party in 1882. The narrowing of the municipal franchise had not been sufficient to weaken the influence of working class ratepayers and householders. In addition the middle class's indifference to municipal politics left the representatives of the merchants vulnerable to the growing opposition of householders and smaller businessmen to the city council. The key to the problem was defined as one of voter apathy as well a dearth of "fit and proper persons"<sup>(151)</sup> willing to stand for council. The Guild saw the solution in mobilising middle class ratepayers to bolster the business interest in the council, for the general good of all. This view was echoed by the Cape Times which had observed that municipal politics had not been held up as a noble cause on the part of Cape Town's elite classes, and consequently, Cape Town was burdened with a populist council that threatened the long-term interests of the city. Central to the Citizen's Guild economic interest was a permanent solution to the city's water supply, which was linked to the question of municipal unification with the suburbs. The remedy to this problem lay in encouraging middle class involvement in municipal politics and educating ratepayers to the worth of civic improvement through organisations such as the Guild, the Cape Peninsula Publicity Association and the press.<sup>(152)</sup>

Ratepayers were in no mood to be persuaded to finance any further municipal undertakings, particularly those which were perceived to be in the interest of the city merchants. As with the elections of 1904 and 1905, water supply once again came to symbolise the wider issues of municipal indebtedness as well as inefficiency and corruption. One example was the "Nuttall contract", a major scandal of the day which involved the City

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(151) E.P. Hennock, Fit and Proper Persons, p.308.

(152) K. Wall, "The unification of Cape Town: 1910-1913", unpublished paper prepared for Contree, March 1988, p.5-15.



THE OWL 24 AUGUST 1906

BLOCKING THE BERG-RIVERITES

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 Engineer, J.Cook, against whom accusations of preferential treatment of tenders for a contract for £200 000 to a British firm for street paving.<sup>(153)</sup> Initially, it was the supporters of the water party who were most affected by the scandal in the wake of the popular perception of widespread corruption in the council.<sup>(154)</sup> A cartoon in The Owl entitled "Blocking the Berg Riverites" clearly shows the popular perception of a linkage between the corruption scandal and the water interests.(see cartoon 9 opposite page) Additional factors such as the prevailing economic depression, the rising municipal debt, the imposition of tariffs such as the School Board rate, a landlord rate and a water rate, were prejudicial to the cause of those who advocated the hinterland scheme and cooperation with the suburbs. Once again an Owl makes this point by showing Parker trying recruit public opinion for a water scheme at a time of bankruptcy, retrenchment and depression.(see cartoon 10 overleaf) Parker's advocacy of a water scheme in these circumstances only served to enhance the position of popular councillors such as Hyman Liberman who wanted a reduction in the municipal rate, and Dr. Abdurahman who had long opposed any further involvement in a hinterland scheme because of its cost.<sup>(155)</sup> The facts that the city's water consumption had actually declined as a consequence of the recession, and the Table Mountain reservoirs were overflowing made a mockery of those who urged that the time was ripe for a joint water scheme with the suburbs for the long term interest of the city.

The lines of conflict in the 1906 municipal election were clearly drawn, with twelve candidates competing for six positions in the council. The Citizens Guild, which came out strongly in favour of a joint water scheme with the suburbs, fielded six candidates

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(153) G. Shaw, Some beginnings, pp.135-136.

(154) *ibid.* The full details and implications of the scandal were only revealed in 1907.

(155) The municipal rate was dropped ¼d to 2½d in 1906 but rose to a record high of 3d the following year.



RECRUITING SERGEANT, P.R.K.R. (to Citizens of Cape Town): "Now then, you're a fine strapping set of young fellows! Why don't you join us? Look at the advantages! Have a drink to start with, and I'll GUARANTEE TO MAKE SOMETHING OF YOU!"

as did the anti-water ratepayers association.(see cartoon 11 overleaf) Included amongst the Citizens Guild candidates was the manager of the Cape Times, Frederick St Leger.<sup>(156)</sup> Other candidates standing on the water ticket, also called the Guild of Six, included Thomas Ball, Andrew Walshe, the vice president of the Cape Town Chamber of Commerce; William Bullen, a merchant and the brother of the new mayor of Rondebosch; and two merchants and former councillors, Charles Mathews and Charles Sedgwick.<sup>(157)</sup>

The ratepayers association anti-water ticket included the current mayor Hyman Liberman; Thomas Palmer, a journalist; William Black, an architect; Frederick Smith, a builder and contractor; and two shopkeepers, William Irwin and Robert Allen.<sup>(158)</sup>

As with the 1904 and 1905 elections no conclusive distinction can be made between the two tickets on the basis of class, although the Citizens' Guild candidates tended to be more representative of the city's business elite than those of the Ratepayers Association who tended to come from the ranks of smaller businessmen. A more significant difference between the two tickets lay in the fact that at least four of the "Guild of Six" who owned businesses in the city actually resided in the suburbs.(see table 6 above) Only one of the anti-water ticket lived outside Cape Town in Wynberg municipality.<sup>(159)</sup> This gave substance to the charge that the Citizens' Guild represented the suburban interest. The Guild of Six, also called the "blue [water] ticket" were seen to be unrepresentative of the interests

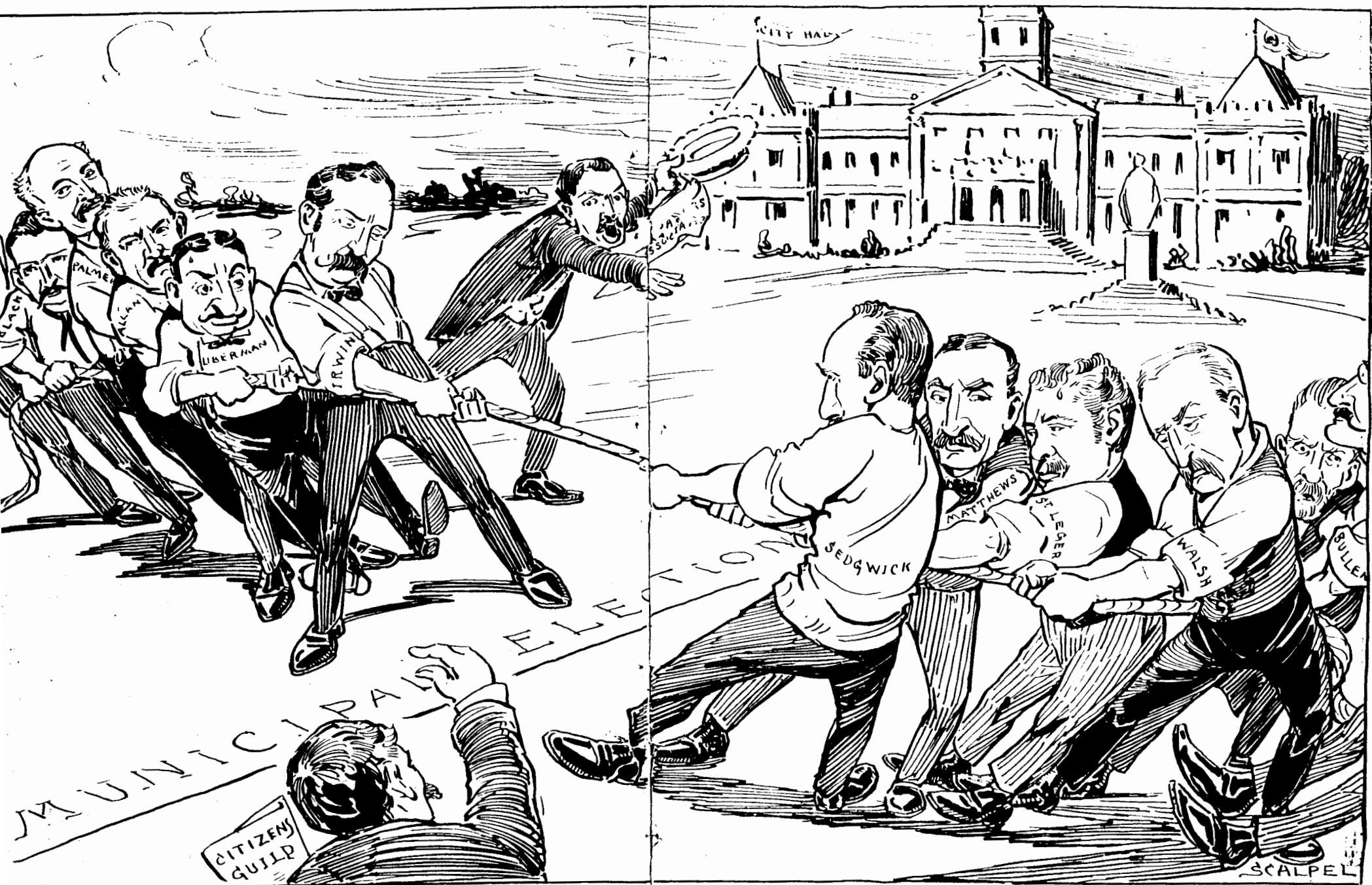
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(156) Cape Times, 6 September 1906.

(157) *ibid*.

(158) Minute of the Mayor, 1907, p.ii.

(159) Robert Allan lived in Wynberg, which was considered neutral as it had its own independant water scheme.



CARTOON II  
THE OWL 7 SEPTEMBER 1906



CARTOON I2

THE OWL 21 SEPTEMBER 1906



OLD LADY (Cape Town): " Oh lor, I hope he will manage to steer the Ship alright."

of Cape Town and that of the average householder. In the popular press the Guild stood accused of:

"working for the benefit of the Adderley and St George's streets and the suburbs" (160)

The South African News, which strongly supported Liberman, offered a blunt criticism of the Citizens' Guild on this matter :

"there was no room for the man with the tall hat and frock coat who lived in the country and wanted to squander the money of ratepayers of the metropolis". (161)

Echoing the populist rhetoric, the manifesto of the Ratepayer's Association reveals a widespread reaction against the influence of business in general with its call for a fair wage clause in municipal contracts and for the resisting of monopolies. (162) An Owl cartoon shows the close relationship between Liberman and the Association. (see cartoon 12 facing page) In contrast to Liberman's dedication to economy and prudence, the Citizens' Guild stood accused of being committed to magnificence, of display, and of extravagance, (163) a perception which was shared by many ratepayers. Once again popular reaction was vented against that familiar symbol of merchant interest, water supply.

Despite these unfavourable conditions, the Guild of Six made the joint hinterland scheme a central plank of their election platform. In response to the anti-water stance of Liberman and the Ratepayers' Association, the Guild of Six argued that Cape Town should lead the suburbs in providing for a long term solution to a water problem which would ultimately affect the city itself. (164) Given Woodstock's recent attempt to develop an

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(160) The South African News, 6 September 1906. (page 6)

(161) *ibid.*

(162) The South African News, 6 September 1906. (Leader)

(163) The South African News, 12 September 1906.

(164) Cape Times, 5 September 1906.

independent suburban scheme, the Guild warned that any future scheme attempted without Cape Town's participation would result in a considerable loss of revenue for the city. This warning was based on the knowledge that Woodstock had attempted to draw away the custom of the Table Bay Harbour Board earlier in that year, (165) with the promise of a substantially lower water rate than that of the city monopoly. (166)

In response to this warning the anti-water party argued that Cape Town would lose little income, even if Woodstock was able to supply the TBHB. The amount of water consumed by the Harbour Board had dropped considerably since the end of the Anglo-Boer war, (see above table 5) or as Liberman put it; "so much so that it would not be long before one would be able to carry all the water that was wanted down there in a bucket". (167) Liberman went on to argue that Cape Town did not need the suburbs, if they needed water:

"well let them have it, and let them pay for it...  
Cape Town [has] no need for water at the present...and  
even if ...[more water was needed] there was a further  
supply on Table Mountain". (168)

The argument over whether Table Mountain was capable of providing more water for Cape Town's needs formed the basis of the counter attack of the Guild of Six, but with little effect given the abundance of water in the city's reservoirs.

The colourful rhetoric which was so characteristic of Liberman frustrated the campaign of the Guild of Six. The Cape Times in

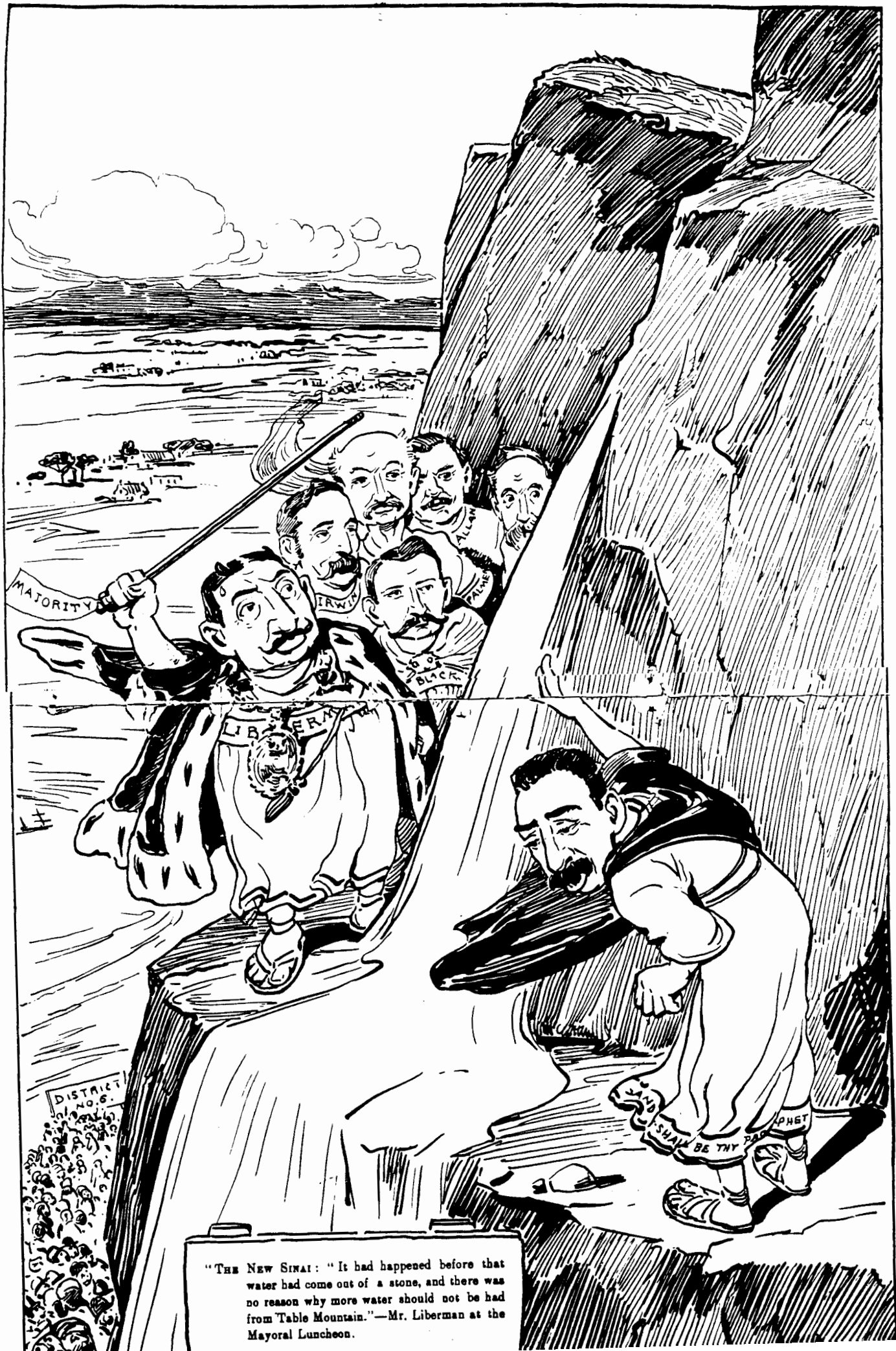
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(165) A.7-1906, Petition of Charles Sedgewick and seven other town councillors.

(166) A.7-1906, p.131.

(167) Cape Times, 5 September 1906.

(168) *ibid*.



"THE NEW SINAI: "It had happened before that water had come out of a stone, and there was no reason why more water should not be had from Table Mountain."—Mr. Liberman at the Mayoral Luncheon.

particular bitterly attacked Liberman as a "class leader", as it had done in 1904, and frequently compared his hold over the city hall to the era of the dirty party of the 1870's and 1880's. (169)

"The circumstances of today are widely different from those of 1880; but the old fight has still to be fought for the sweetness and the wholesomeness, won after years of struggle, are to be secured if the city is to grow...without which it cannot expect to vindicate its metropolitan claims." (170)

In spite of the strong support lent to the Guild of Six by the Cape Times, its candidates failed to win a single place on the city council. (171) A few weeks after the election Liberman was elected for a third consecutive term as mayor.

To the further dismay of the Citizen's Guild Liberman confirmed his standpoint that Table Mountain was the answer to Cape Town's future water needs and that the city did not have to look to the hinterland for water. At his inauguration as mayor he proclaimed:

"As Moses struck the rock and obtained water for the people of Israel, so the rock of Table Mountain would be found sufficient for the needs of Cape Town". (172)

This provided material for The Owl in a cartoon declaring "Another Peninsula Miracle". (see cartoon 13 opposite) Significantly this cartoon reveals the basis of Liberman's support with its inclusion of the onlooking working class of District Six. (see bottom left hand corner) The Cape Times, embittered by the Guild's defeat, retorted "If Moses came to Cape Town" he would have discovered two 'rocks', "one rock [Berg River Hoek] would yield five times the daily supply yielded by the other [Table Mountain] at less than half the cost". (173)

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(169) Cape Times, 18 July 1906.

(170) *ibid.*

(171) Cape Times, 11 September 1906. Results of poll: Anti-water party; Liberman (6888); Irwin (6571); Allan (5987); Black (5884); Smith (5240); Palmer (5100). The Citizen's Guild: Mathews (3670); Sedgewick (3275); St Leger (3184); Ball (3053); Bullen (2550); Walsh (2440).

(172) Cape Times, 11 October 1906.

(173) *ibid.*

THE OWL 28 SEPTEMBER 1906

THE LAST SAD OFFICE





The 1906 election marks the end of the city's attempt to develop a water scheme in the hinterland, until municipal unification in 1913. The period between 1904 and 1906 represents the ascendancy of councillors supporting economy and efficiency over those who advocated a continuation of municipal improvement. A cartoon by The Owl, "The Last Sad Office", aptly depicts the death of Berg River Scheme as a literal burial. (see cartoon 14 opposite page)

After the defeat of the Citizens' Guild's candidates in the 1906 election, efforts to reassert the interest of business over city hall tacitly avoided the emotive issue of water supply in order to avoid a further diminution of their representation within the city council but The Owl continued to remind voters of Parker's purpose in subsequent elections. (see Cartoon 15 overleaf)

Supporters of a hinterland water scheme, particularly Parker, concentrated their efforts outside the city council in an attempt to convince the citizens of Cape Town of the cause of municipal unification and water supply.

#### THE COLLAPSE OF THE HINTERLAND SCHEME; 1907-1910.

The defeat of the water party was to provide Woodstock with another opportunity to pursue its own hinterland scheme. This time there was no serious opposition, yet it ended in a total collapse within a couple of years.

As a result of the water party's defeat in 1906, the Suburban Joint Water and Drainage Committee was reconstituted in November of that year in order to address the deteriorating position of water supply in the Peninsula. By late December the municipalities had held a meeting with the Commissioner of Public

CARTOON 15

THE OWL 6 SEPTEMBER 1907

THE FORTHCOMING MUNICIPAL ELECTION





Works and the General Manager of the Railways and the Harbour Board to seek guarantees for the government's purchase of water which would enable the suburbs to finance their own scheme.<sup>(174)</sup> This was agreed by the government on condition that a bill be introduced to parliament in the next session to enable the immediate start of a hinterland water scheme.<sup>(175)</sup> After a further engineer's report was issued by the respected engineer Thomas Stewart, the suburban joint committee decided to adopt a modified scheme in the Wemmershoek valley.<sup>(176)</sup> The new scheme differed from Woodstock's 1906 water bill both in terms of its substantially reduced capacity and in the cost of the project.

The agreement reached provoked an angry response from Cape Town. In fact it seems that the mayor of Cape Town, Hymen Liberman, had been deliberately deceived by Woodstock. He was later to claim that an agreement had been made with Andrew Cunningham, the mayor of Woodstock, whereby Cape Town would not oppose the new suburban water bill on condition that Woodstock refrain from attempting to secure the custom of the Table Bay Harbour Board.<sup>(177)</sup> Despite Liberman's dismissal of the importance of the TBHB during the 1906 election, this agreement underlines the fact that income from this source was indeed an important, albeit declining, source of revenue for the city.<sup>(178)</sup> Woodstock on the other hand was very much aware that the financing of its hinterland scheme would be extremely difficult if water could not be sold to the large government consumers. Equally important for Woodstock to succeed was Cape Town's acquiescence, as the city's opposition to

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(174) 3/CT 9/5, Report of the Suburban Joint Water and Drainage Committee, 1907, p.3.

(175) *ibid.*

(176) *ibid.*

(177) A.1-1907, Cape of Good Hope (Colony), Report of the select committee on the Southern Suburbs Water Supply Bill, p.131.

(178) A.1-1907, p.138.

the Southern Suburbs Water Supply Bill would again have jeopardised its safe passage through parliament.

Despite Woodstock's apparent manipulation of the anti-water party, opposition to the Southern Suburbs Water Supply Bill arose from a broad spectrum of city councillors who concentrated their efforts on derailing the Wemmershoek scheme.<sup>(179)</sup>

In September 1907 Woodstock's Southern Suburbs Water Supply Bill finally came before parliament. Cape Town's parliamentary representatives, J.W. Jagger and Sir William Thorne attacked the government's handling of the Wemmershoek scheme, accusing the government of "subterfuge" and of attempting to "take away the bread of Cape Town" by allowing the TBHB to enter into an agreement with Woodstock.<sup>(180)</sup> It was argued that Cape Town had been obliged to supply the TBHB by government proclamation<sup>(181)</sup>, and that the additional storage reservoirs on Table Mountain need never have been built if it were not for the demand for water made by shipping.<sup>(182)</sup> Supporters of the Southern Suburbs Water Supply Bill in turn accused Cape Town of "blackmail" and of seriously threatening the interests of shipping by way of its excessive water tariffs.<sup>(183)</sup> Cape Town was also accused of preventing the municipality of Green Point and Sea Point from obtaining cheaper water from the proposed Wemmershoek scheme by its refusal to allow water pipes to be laid within its municipal boundaries.<sup>(184)</sup> Cape Town's aggressive stance gained it little sympathy within parliament, as the water-hungry suburbs were depicted as the victims of the city's avarice. With the passing

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(179) A.1-1907, pp.138-141.

(180) House of Assembly Debates, September 1907, p.586.

(181) *ibid.*

(182) *ibid.*

(183) House of Assembly Debates, September 1907, p.595.

(184) *ibid.*

of the Southern Suburbs Water Supply Bill by fifty votes against eight, it appeared as if Cape Town's monopoly over the Peninsula's water supply had finally ended.<sup>(185)</sup>

While the Southern Suburbs Water Supply Act represented a defeat for the city, it was no more than a pyrrhic victory for Woodstock. Ironically, after five years of bitter struggle to gain acceptance of its interests at Wemmershoek, its powers were never put into effect. The economic reality of the suburbs financial position, combined with the prevailing economic depression, resulted in their failure to gain a loan on the London Market.<sup>(186)</sup> The final blow delivered to the scheme came in 1908 when Woodstock became ensnared in an embarrassing financial scandal, dubbed the "Walter Steyn Affair",<sup>(187)</sup> which resulted in the indefinite delay of Wemmershoek scheme.

Walter Steyn was an alias for Septimus Smith, the brother of the town clerk of Woodstock who, in 1909, fraudulently sold a farm to the municipality in the Wemmershoek valley for a sum of £ 23 000. It was discovered that 'Steyn' had acquired the farm just a few hours previously for only £ 6000. <sup>(188)</sup> "Steyn" was paid partly in the form of municipal debentures, which he promptly resold, laying the foundations of a complex legal wrangle.<sup>(189)</sup> The resulting litigation and publicity which was to last for almost three years proved to be both a disaster and an embarrassment for

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(185) House of Assembly Debates, September 1907, p.586.

(186) SMW, Volume 33, Papers received: Wemmershoek 1909-1913. Notes of the Proceedings of the committee of Management with the Administrator of the Cape, 12 February 1912, p.2.

(187) South African Review. This paper gave the episode extensive and dramatised coverage of the scandal over a period of three years.

(188) J.T.Wylde papers; Government Inquiry into the Purchase of Land by Woodstock municipality for a Water Scheme, Report and Minutes of Evidence, July/August 1908. University of Cape Town Archives (not cataloged)

(189) SMW, Volume 33, Letters Wemmershoek, Summary of Inscribed Stock, 1909.

Woodstock.<sup>(190)</sup> By mid-1912, just before Woodstock's options over water rights in the Wemmershoek catchment area were due to expire, the municipality had virtually nothing to show for the £ 77 000 it had invested in the scheme over a period of ten years.<sup>(191)</sup>

In Cape Town, Liberman and the anti-water party also suffered a reversal in their position. The ongoing scandal surrounding the Nuttall Contract was to reach its height in March 1907, when the Cape Times rejected the findings of an internal commission of inquiry which blamed city officials for irregularities rather than the councillors involved.<sup>(192)</sup> The relationship between the paper and the city council deteriorated to the point that the latter switched its advertising to competitors.<sup>(193)</sup>

The scandal largely explains why William Duncan-Baxter succeeded Liberman as mayor after the elections of 1907. Water supply was to become less important in the city council over the next few years, as businessmen realised that the issue, would reduce their influence in the municipal government. Parker resigned from the council in 1908, and was later to form the Peninsula Unification Society as means of realising his objectives.

After 1907 to 1912, no further serious attempts were made to develop water schemes in the hinterland. Ultimately the deterioration in the peninsula's water supply was to contribute to a shift in attitude towards unification, a development that will be examined in the following chapter.

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(190) Much to the embarrassment of Woodstock Steyn escaped prosecution by fleeing to Australia.

(191) SMW, Volume 33, Letters Wemmershoek: Volume 33, Papers received: Wemmershoek 1909-1913. Notes of the Proceedings of the Committee of Management with the Administrator of the Cape, 12 February 1912, p.4

(192) G. Shaw, Some Beginnings, pp.136-137.

(193) *ibid.*

7

# CONCLUSION: THE FAILURE TO AUGMENT WATER SUPPLY.

The period between the Peninsula Commission in 1902 and the end of the decade represents a transitional period for the city and suburban municipalities. The move towards unification in 1902 was perhaps premature, as municipal objectives were based almost entirely on the need to augment water supply, rather than on an acceptance of the peninsula's political and economic unity. When Cape Town's water supply improved from about 1904, its need for cooperation with the suburbs diminished correspondingly.

Water was rejected not only because of increased supply, but because it was perceived to be in the interest of business. The fact that an increased water supply would have benefited the working classes seems to have escaped the attention of their representatives. Working class rejection of water was not irrational, but was as a consequence of their political isolation for supporting the dirty party in the nineteenth century.

The link between municipal politics and water supply is again clearly illustrated in this period. These years represent the culmination of a process of reaction against the merchant interest in the council that had its origins in the late 1890's. To an extent, it afforded an alliance of interests between the ratepayers' association, certain businessmen and the working classes. The reaction against municipal extravagance and corruption was symbolised in the city council's perceived obsession with water. A hinterland water scheme costing some £2 000 000 was a natural target of those who called for economy. The perception of self-interest was cemented by the questions surrounding the relationship between the Adderley street and the suburban interests. The issue of water supply thus became linked with the question of municipal unification. As unification was

perceived to be in the interests of the suburbs and not the city, the issue of a joint water scheme was similarly overshadowed by doubts of whether it was in the city's interest.

The failure to augment the Cape Peninsula's water supply during this period may then be attributed to various economic, social and political conflicts operating within Cape Town and between the city and the suburbs. The most important consequence of this was that it delayed municipal unification for a decade.

PHOTOGRAPH 10  
STEENBRAS DAM c. 1921



## CHAPTER THREE

### " Gold vs. The People" (1)

#### MUNICIPAL UNIFICATION AND THE 1917 WATER REFERENDUM.

In the period between 1910 and 1921 Cape Town's long-standing problem of water supply was resolved for the time being. The era in which it had played a central role in municipal politics in the city and in the emergent peninsula municipalities came to an end.

The issue of water supply had assumed a central role in Cape Town's development, mainly because it coincided with a phase of dramatic growth and major economic transformation in the city's history. The " massive costs of extending supplies" in P.J. Waller's words, brought political turmoil.<sup>(2)</sup> Reduced costs after the 1920's diminished its impact on the city's political and economic affairs.

In this chapter, two interrelated events are focused upon. The first concerns the process of municipal unification around 1913, the second was an extraordinary municipal referendum which took place in 1917.

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- (1) Cape Times, 18 July 1917. The words of J.W. Mushet, a city councillor. A remark made during a referendum in 1917, when ratepayers had to choose between two water schemes. The Steenbras scheme was perceived to be interest of the business classes, giving rise to the accusation of Gold versus the People.
- (2) P.J. Waller, Town, City, and Nation: England 1850-1914, 1983, p.302.



The relationship between economic burden and political turmoil was even more dramatic in this period, for it was the suburban water crisis of 1910 that was largely responsible for precipitating the final acceptance of municipal unification in 1913. This crisis influenced the terms of unification, perpetuating inherent conflict between city and suburbs and delaying the final resolution of the water crisis by several years.

As in the case of earlier conflicts, water supply was intricately bound up with class relationships within the context of Cape Town's municipal politics, at a time during which the city continued to experience fundamental social and economic change. The unification of city and suburb did not take place within a vacuum, nor was it simply planned by city hall or by the town's economic elite. Unification and the problems that arose out of it, was the outcome of interaction between a wide range of conflicting interests, including the working classes.

The climax of this chapter lies in the 1917 water referendum, in which the direction of the city's water supply was decided. The division and conflict that emerged during the referendum can only be understood in terms of the earlier conflicts over water. Its immediate causes had their origins in the process of municipal unification which had taken place between 1910 and 1913.

#### MUNICIPAL UNIFICATION AND WATER SUPPLY.

The concept of a unified peninsula had been debated even before the turn of the nineteenth century. Such attempts had a long history of failure. The first united municipality in the

Southern Peninsula had collapsed in 1886, with the breakup of the fledgling Liesbeeck Municipality. A major problem had been the cost of developing an infrastructure to service its vast undeveloped area.<sup>(3)</sup> By the turn of the century, the suburban municipalities had grown to such an extent that their municipal services, although underdeveloped, were often duplicated and were therefore inefficient and costly. The initiatives of the colonial government in 1902 had failed, partly because of Cape Town's reluctance to be burdened with the expense of developing the suburban infrastructure. Attempts at developing a joint peninsula water supply scheme had only reinforced the divisions between city and suburb. Later attempts at initiating joint municipal projects like a combined peninsula abattoir had also ended in failure.<sup>(4)</sup>

By 1910 suburban resistance to amalgamation with Cape Town had diminished considerably, as a result of their increasing dependence on the city for water. As early as 1909 the Suburban Municipal Water Board had urgently proposed that it be amalgamated with Cape Town's waterworks.<sup>(5)</sup> This proposal was rejected by the city, which offered to increase its sale of water to the SMWB to an amount of up to 250 000 gallons daily.<sup>(6)</sup> Cape Town's refusal was hardly surprising as there were substantial profits to be made out of selling surplus water to the suburbs, whereas a merger would only result in the city inheriting the suburban water crisis. Cape Town's water

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(3) See Chapter One. It was argued that the main reason for the break-up of the Liesbeeck municipality arose from differences over the augmentation of water supply.

(4) 3/CT 1/4/7/2/1/1-2, Joint Slaughterhouses Committee, 1909-1910.

(5) Minute of the Mayor, 1910, p.67.

(6) *ibid.*

consumption had decreased marginally between 1907 and 1910 (see table 8 below) so there was little incentive for the city to address long-term water supply problems with any sense of urgency.

TABLE 8

DAILY AVERAGE WATER CONSUMPTION\* OF CAPE TOWN AND THE SMWB FROM 1907 TO 1910 SHOWING COMPARATIVE PERCENTAGE INCREASE/DECREASE

	Daily consumption SMWB	% increase	Daily consumption Cape Town	% increase/ decrease
1907	1 290 000mg		2 650 000mg	
1908	1 320 000mg	+2,3	2 450 000mg	-7,5
1909	1 414 000mg	+7,1	2 200 000mg	-10,2
1910	1 494 000mg	+5,6	2 400 000mg	+9,0

\* consumption in million gallons

(7)

Since 1900 the suburbs had only managed to meet the demand of increased consumption by purchasing supplies from Cape Town, and by taking water illegally from the Liesbeek River which belonged to farmers with riparian rights.<sup>(8)</sup> By 1910 the SMWB ceased supplying water to peninsula railway authorities in its area.<sup>(9)</sup> Despite these measures water consumption averaged only 24 gallons a head per day in the suburbs,<sup>(10)</sup> far short of the recommended minimum of 30 gallons per day and even further behind Cape Town's average daily supply of 36 gallons per head or Durban's daily

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- (7) Report of the Municipal Union Conference: Appointed to Report upon and Prepare a Bill for the Unification of the Cape Peninsula Municipalities, March 1912, p. 20.
- (8) J. Parker, Municipal Union in the Cape Peninsula, 1911, p.19. The SMWB was illegally drawing 500 000 gallons daily from the Liesbeek in violation of a Supreme Court decision that the water belonged to the farmers. One of the consequences of this was that the lower reaches of the river were left stagnant and polluted, posing a major health hazard.
- (9) Report of the Municipal Union Conference, pp.20-21.
- (10) ibid.

average of 50 gallons of water per head.<sup>(11)</sup> By the summer of 1910, the SMWB could no longer meet the demand.

The perpetual water shortage represented a major crisis for the suburbs as it affected other important areas of municipal development. It was largely responsible for the long delayed development of a suburban sewage and drainage scheme, presenting a major health threat for the entire Peninsula.<sup>(12)</sup> Perhaps more than any other factor, it was the impending water crisis that finally pushed the suburbs into seeking unification with Cape Town. Others included the prolonged economic depression after the Anglo-Boer war which forced the municipalities to investigate ways of economising through cooperating over matters of common concern such as a joint abattoir, fire brigade and electricity service.<sup>(13)</sup> This had become possible because of the physical blurring of the boundaries between municipalities. As the middle classes moved into the suburbs, but continued to commute to the city, so the city and suburb increasingly functioned as one economic, social and political unit.<sup>(14)</sup> In a more general sense, the movement to Union in South Africa provided an example for the centralisation of power.<sup>(15)</sup>

Unification gradually became generally accepted as the most obvious solution to the peninsula's problems, although resistance continued. As a result of municipal intransigence over this issue, a 'Peninsula Municipal Union Society' [PMUC] was formed in

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(11) J. Parker, Municipal Union, p.18.

(12) L.A.W. Beck, in J. Parker, Municipal Union, p.10 & p.14.

(13) 3/CT 1/4/7/2/1/1-2, Joint Slaughterhouses Committee, 1909-1910.

(14) The development of the suburban railwayline, perhaps than any other factor, was responsible for the geographic integration of city and suburbs.

(15) K.Wall, "The Unification of Cape Town: 1910-1913", unpublished paper prepared for Contree, 1988, p.4.

1910, with John Parker as chairman.<sup>(16)</sup> The efforts of the PMUC were to culminate in the establishment of a Municipal Union conference in the following year. Parker had been at the forefront in popularising of unification ever since the establishment of the Peninsula Commission in 1902.<sup>(17)</sup> Although his advocacy of a single municipality had been closely linked with his campaign for the Berg River Scheme, since the collapse of this project he had urged unification on other grounds. Parker argued that a single large municipality would be more efficient as it would attract "more capable men",<sup>(18)</sup> an important matter when there were frequent accusations of municipal corruption and incompetence.<sup>(19)</sup> He argued rather optimistically that a large body with more interests, powers and responsibilities would be more strenuous and straight in the performance of their duty than the small municipalities that were the most corrupt.<sup>(20)</sup> Parker's reasoning attracted wide support. The eight Peninsula municipalities had a total of 87 councillors, while the joint salaries of all the town engineers amounted to £1800 a year whereas, Parker argued, "half of this would attract an engineer of high standing and experience".<sup>(21)</sup> While public opinion mounted in favour of unification a minority of councillors, particularly within the City Hall, were equally determined to oppose it.

The critics of unification within Cape Town were led by councillors Hyman Liberman and David Bean and included amongst their ranks councillors Dr. Abdurahman and Henry Bam. Although

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(16) K. Wall, "The Unification of Cape Town", p.5.

(17) For example through the Cape Town Publicity Association, and by publishing books and pamphlets on the subject.

(18) J. Parker, Municipal Union, p.5.

(19) For example the 'Nuttall contract' and 'Walter Steyn affair'

(20) J. Parker, Municipal Union, p.4.

(21) *ibid.*, p.5.

they were opposed to unification to different degrees and for various reasons, their common concern was that Cape Town should not inherit the problems and cost of unification. This is abundantly clear from the preconditions demanded by these councillors before the city council should commit itself to participating in Parker's proposed Unification Conference to be held in mid-1911. They included that water accounts be kept separate from ordinary rates; that water tariffs within Cape Town not be raised; that the city ratepayers not be called upon to pay for any loss caused by an excess of water expenditure over revenue and that unification be on the lines of differential rating so that all services provided after unification for a particular area be paid for by such an area.<sup>(22)</sup> These conditions made the position of the anti-unificationists abundantly clear. They had no desire to subsidise improvements in the suburbs, or to share the profits from the city's lucrative waterworks department. The basic principal that they embodied, that Cape Town should not have to pay for unification, was eventually to become incorporated into the unification ordinance of 1913 and it affected the course of development of the Peninsula's water supply in the post-unification period. It is also true that water supply affected the process and terms of unification, which in turn became the root cause of internal conflicts that were to plague the unified municipality over the choice of a hinterland water scheme.

The conflict between unificationists and anti-unificationists is in many ways a manifestation of the earlier struggle between the water and anti-water parties. Firstly the argument for and against unification revolved around the question of its cost and benefit to Cape Town. Secondly, and more significantly, John Parker's drive for municipal unification was seen by Liberman and others as no more than a thinly disguised attempt to reintroduce

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(22) Minute of the Mayor, 1911, pp.34-35.

the Berg River scheme. Much of the criticism levelled against the supporters of unification alluded to, and was coloured by the earlier conflicts over water supply.

At the Municipal Union Conference in March 1911, the issue of water supply was thrust onto centre stage. Soon after the Conference had begun its investigation into the necessity and terms of unification, the Cape Times urged that the first duty of a unified council would be to augment water supply.<sup>(23)</sup> Soon afterwards the Cape Times reacted angrily to an attempt made by anti-unificationists to "associate members of the Municipal union Conference with a specific water scheme"<sup>(24)</sup> alluding to Parker's long-standing interest in the Berg River Scheme. This accusation emanated from Liberman, who used every argument to support his vehement opposition to unification. While Liberman's opposition appears to be personal, and even irrational,<sup>(25)</sup> others generally opposed unification on the grounds that they feared that Cape Town would have to bear the cost of a hinterland scheme, but even amongst these critics there were considerable differences in the degree of opposition to the principle of municipal union itself.

On the one hand, Hyman Liberman totally opposed union on the grounds that the area and population of single peninsula authority was too large to be efficient,<sup>(26)</sup> and refused to accept the financial estimates of the Conference.<sup>(27)</sup> This position was

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(23) Cape Times, 11 April 1911.

(24) Cape Times, 26 April 1912.

(25) For example Liberman stubbornly refused to accept the accuracy of the statistics gathered by the unification conference.

(26) Cape Times, 26 April 1912. Liberman wanted the peninsula to be made up of boroughs, each with their own mayors and officials.

(27) Cape Times, 19 April 1912.

also supported by councillor Dr. Abdurahman who made the accusation that:

"Those who sat on the Conference had done so with the intention of securing Unification, and...sought for every argument to prove their case".<sup>(28)</sup>

Abdurahman's opposition to unification was more firmly based on the assumption that any "big water scheme" initiated by a united municipality would not be beneficial to the city's working classes.<sup>(29)</sup> Later, the threatened inclusion of a colour bar clause in the draft unification ordinance intensified his opposition.<sup>(30)</sup>

Other anti-unificationists included David Bean, who was generally regarded as the leader of those opposed to unification in the city council. He was not entirely against the concept of a single municipality but sought unification at a reasonable price<sup>(31)</sup> This meant that the city should not have to bear the cost of providing the suburbs with water, drainage and sanitation systems which it already possessed.

Despite the different reasons for opposing unification, the campaign of the anti-unificationists focused on the issue of the cost of water supply. In an editorial the Cape Times noted that:

"One of the favourite devices of those...trying to defeat the scheme for Unification of the Peninsula municipalities is to attack the figures given in the Report of the municipal Union conference in regard to the anticipated cost of an augmented water supply for the Peninsula".<sup>(32)</sup>

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(28) Cape Times, 19 April 1912.

(29) ibid.

(30) Cape Times, 17 December 1912.

(31) Cape Times, 18 April 1912.

(32) Cape Times, 27 April 1912.



Indeed the campaign waged against Parker's unification conference resembled that of the earlier municipal water elections where attempts were made to link business interests to the development of a hinterland scheme.

In spite of the anti-unificationists attempts to derail the Municipal Union Conference with what the Cape Times called the "big water boggy",<sup>(33)</sup> the work of the conference proceeded remarkably smoothly. The participating municipalities, which included Kalk Bay; Woodstock; Mowbray; Rondebosch; Claremont; Maitland; Sea Point and Cape Town reached consensus on most issues except that of the financial cost of unification. Only Wynberg municipality chose not to participate, for it had little to benefit from unification due to the advanced state of its municipal infrastructure as well as its independent water supply. This enabled it to remain in "splendid isolation" until the mid 1920's.<sup>(34)</sup>

The first draft report of the Conference issued in March 1912 attempted to address the cost of unification by recommending a system of differential rating for specific improvements such as sanitation systems, drainage, street construction, and most important of all, for a water supply scheme. For such projects the united municipality was to be divided into three rating districts: (i) Sea Point; (ii) Cape Town and Kalk Bay and (iii) Woodstock, Mowbray, Maitland, Rondebosch and Claremont. Each was ranked according to the degree which each municipality was developed.<sup>(35)</sup> Under this system each district would be

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(33) Cape Times, 3 December 1912.

(34) In 1927 Wynberg was similarly forced to join Cape Town as its reservoirs could no longer provide sufficient water.

(35) Report of the Municipal Union Conference: Appointed to Report upon and Prepare a Bill for the Unification of the Cape Peninsula Municipalities, March 1912

additionally and separately rated in relation to any improvements they received. This compromise had been designed to allay Cape Town's objection that it would have to bear the cost of any improvements in the suburbs. These concessions were not enough to satisfy all the anti-unificationists who continued to argue that Cape Town was paying too high a price for unification. Unification was depicted as no more than a euphemism for "a big water scheme".<sup>(36)</sup> Given Cape Town's long history of failed hinterland schemes, there was a real danger that the opposition of a small group of anti-unification councillors might succeed in destroying the unification conference by mobilising ratepayers around familiar issues, or by demanding intolerable concessions from the suburbs.

Following the release of unification conference's first report, an attempt was made by the city council to allay the suspicions of the anti-unificationists by proposing amendments to the clauses of the draft unification ordinance dealing with water supply and finance.<sup>(37)</sup> Of importance was a recommendation to amend clause 137 to further limit Cape Town's financial liability and to establish restrictive conditions for the development of a hinterland scheme.<sup>(38)</sup> An attempt to defuse a potential crisis was made with the nomination of two of the more moderate anti-unificationist councillors, David Bean and Henry Bam, amongst Cape Town's six delegates to the unification congress, which was due to be reconvened in August 1912.<sup>(39)</sup> The influential Citizens' Guild was not so compromising, and promised support to candidates pledged to Unification in the municipal election in September, representing an oblique threat to Liberman and Bam whose terms were due to expire.<sup>(40)</sup>

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(36) Cape Times, 4 May 1912.

(37) Minute of the Mayor, 1912, pp.22-25.

(38) Cape Times, 17 July 1912.

(39) Minute of the Mayor, 1912, pp.22-25.

(40) Cape Times, 30 July 1912.

Cape Town's compromise amendment of the 'water clauses' were rejected by the suburban municipalities, which had the effect of precipitating a renewed crisis in city hall.

In mid November 1912 the Municipal Union Conference issued a amended report and draft unification ordinance.<sup>(41)</sup> These recommendations were accompanied by a minority report issued by David Bean and Henry Bam as well as Charles Gibbs, a councillor from the municipality of Sea Point.<sup>(42)</sup> This objected to the majority report's rejection of Cape Town's compromise amendments regarding differential rating and water rates. This situation had arisen because Cape Town's other four delegates to the conference gave in to suburban pressure, claiming that the amendments would have "wrecked the conference",<sup>(43)</sup> and for this reason had signed the majority report. At a meeting of the city council on the 25th of November the dissidents were defeated, and the Report of the Unification Conference was passed by 14 votes to 5.<sup>(44)</sup> The anti-unificationists did not see this as the end of their struggle, but shifted their attention to mobilising ratepayers against accepting the terms of unification at a poll set for the 19th of December 1912.

The anti-unification councillor's attempt to rally ratepayers against unification was directed at the suburb's rejection of the compromise amendments, which they held to be proof that unification was no more than a conspiracy for a big water scheme. Ratepayers were asked to approve unification only if the water amendments were included in the unification ordinance. It was suggested that without these guarantees a vote for unification would be a "vote for the Berg River scheme".<sup>(45)</sup> Ratepayers were

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(41) Minute of the Mayor, 1913, pp.17-18.

(42) Minute of the Mayor, 1913, p.19. Sea Point received its water from Cape Town thus had little to gain from unification.

(43) Cape Times, 21 November 1912.

(44) Cape Times, 28 November 1912.

(45) Minute of the Mayor, 1913, pp.20-21.

not asked if they accepted or rejected unification, but if they approved of the final draft unification ordinance, or the re-incorporation of the compromise water amendments that the city had proposed in July 1912.<sup>(46)</sup>

Despite the backing of the South African News, the anti-unificationist's campaign was undercut by the fact that there was widespread support for unification. Furthermore the city was experiencing a severe drought, and was beginning to encounter water shortages for the first time in nearly a decade.

Despite a vigorous campaign for the inclusion of the water amendments, the unification ordinance was overwhelmingly accepted by 2681 to 1208 votes.<sup>(47)</sup> Significantly, the wealthier ratepayers who possessed up to three votes, tended to support the unamended ordinance, while working class ratepayers with only a single vote, tended to support the inclusion of the water clauses.<sup>(48)</sup> This tendency is illustrated in the table below:

TABLE 9

## VOTES IN FAVOUR OF UNAMENDED UNIFICATION ORDINANCE

Ratepayers with:		Total votes	as a % of actual ratepayers
1 vote	274	274	23,2%
2 votes	302	604	25,7%
3 votes	601	1803	51,1%
total	1175	2681	100,0%

## VOTES IN FAVOUR OF AMENDED UNIFICATION ORDINANCE

Ratepayers with:		Total votes	as a % of actual ratepayers
1 vote	191	191	33,2%
2 votes	138	276	23,9%
3 votes	247	741	42,9%
total	576	1208	100,0%

(49)

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(46) Minute of the Mayor, 1913, pp.20-21.

(47) ibid.

(48) Cape Times, 20 December, 1912.

(49) ibid.

This poll, like earlier municipal elections, reflects a general class division over the issue of water supply. It would seem that working class ratepayers, and to a lesser extent the middle classes, considered the issue of water as the prerogative of the wealthy suburban classes and business elite. Before the poll the Cape Times complained that there was a "conspiracy in certain quarters to prejudice the coloured voters of Cape Town against unification".<sup>(50)</sup> The issue of water supply, which had been inextricably linked to municipal reform and improvement in the nineteenth century, and now to unification, was once again perceived to be in the interests of the city's elite in the eyes of these classes.

In comparison to the conflict within Cape Town, the suburban ratepayers eagerly supported the unification ordinance in the hope that it would bring a swift end to their pursuit for an adequate water supply. Only the ratepayers of Wynberg municipality, with its independent source of water supply, rejected unification by 787 votes to 391.<sup>(51)</sup>

Despite the suburb's earlier rejection of the compromise 'water clauses', the legislative basis of municipal unification cannot be seen as economically detrimental to Cape Town. Although the city was eager for unification, the fact that it was negotiating from a position of strength is reflected in the final unification ordinance. The Ordinance in fact contained several clauses that protected Cape Town's ratepayers from bearing the cost of excessive expenditure in the suburbs. The most significant of these was clause 22, which concerned differential rating. This stipulated that the former municipalities of Cape Town and Sea Point would only be responsible for a third of the cost of any

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(50) Cape Times, 17 December 1912.

(51) Cape Times, 20 December 1912.

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new water scheme.<sup>(52)</sup> A further safeguard against extravagant water schemes was clause 39 of the ordinance, which stipulated that sources of supply within the peninsula must be exploited first, and that if any such scheme's cost was to exceed £300 000, it could be vetoed by the ratepayers of Cape Town and Sea Point.<sup>(53)</sup>

The principle that Cape Town should not have to pay for unification was thus embedded in the final unification ordinance. While this represented a victory for the city's ratepayers, this was only in the short term, for the cost of what was essentially an unequal agreement, was a protracted struggle over the choice of a scheme after unification.

It was perhaps ironic, that no sooner had the unification ordinance been ratified by the peninsula municipalities in early 1913, that Cape Town experienced one of its most critical water shortages, which had the effect of pushing the issue of water supply to the fore. By April 1913 water reserves had been depleted so seriously by the absence of rain that the municipality deemed it necessary to cut off the city's water supply daily between 4pm and 5am.<sup>(54)</sup> In the suburbs the situation was even more serious, as Cape Town was unable to make up the shortfall in their supply, forcing the Suburban Municipal Water Board to turn to Wynberg municipality for relief.<sup>(55)</sup> Fortunately, by May 1913, enough rain had fallen to enable water restrictions to be lifted. It had become

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(52) The Ordinance to provide for the combination and better government of certain Municipalities in the Cape Peninsula, Ordinance 19/1913, clause 22.

(53) *ibid.*, clause 39.

(54) Minute of the Mayor, 1913, pp.66-68.

(55) *ibid.*

apparent that the new unified council would have to confront the issue of water supply as one of its first priorities.

Appropriately, John Parker was elected as the first mayor of the new unified municipality. It seemed as if Cape Town was poised on the brink of an era of rapid development. In his inaugural speech, Parker described the accomplishment of unification as:

"The dawn of a new era in the Municipal life of this Peninsula. It is the day of high hopes and buoyant expectancy, and we see no shadow in the future. This Peninsula, so long divided municipally, is now united, and the bonds of union never will be broken."<sup>(56)</sup>

Parker's optimism was misplaced, for unification was to bring about many problems, especially those relating to water supply, the final solution to which was to allude the city until the 1920's.

#### THE 1917 WATER REFERENDUM

Despite the recurrence of severe water shortages after unification, little progress was made in developing supplies during the next few years, largely due to the outbreak of the world war in 1914 but also due to the fact the municipality's energy was directed at restructuring the various departments of the old authorities.<sup>(57)</sup> A month after unification, the issue of water supply was referred to the city Waterworks Committee. As an interim measure it recommended that the Table Mountain catchment area be expanded and that the Peninsula's resources be rationalised.<sup>(58)</sup>

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(56) Minute of the Mayor, 1913.

(57) 3/CT 1/5/8/1/1, Report of a Special Committee in re: Augmentation of Water Supply, to be considered at the meeting of the council to be held on 26th April 1917.

(58) *ibid.*

Unification resulted in the amalgamation of the autonomous Suburban Municipal Water Board with Cape Town's water works in 1914, as well as the acquisition of the Muizenberg reservoirs belonging to Kalk Bay Municipality, but this was inadequate for the requirements of the Peninsula. By February 1915 a report by the Waterworks Committee made it clear that the city could no longer rely on the Table Mountain dams,<sup>(59)</sup> and that immediate action was needed if the city's wartime industry was to be sustained and if the health of the population was to be improved.<sup>(60)</sup> It also warned that the construction of the suburban drainage system, which was due to commence in 1915, would be unable to function unless additional water could be provided.<sup>(61)</sup> The report urged that the time had arrived for the development of a major scheme outside of the Peninsula, and recommended that particular attention be given to the Wemmershoek and Steenbras catchment areas.<sup>(62)</sup>

This report was an important turning point and resulted in the city council creating a new special committee to investigate the development of a scheme capable of supplying between three to five million gallons daily to the Peninsula. The Special Committee was to have the power to appoint a board of experts, or engineers, to report on all possible schemes, both within and outside of the Cape Peninsula.<sup>(63)</sup>

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- (59) 3/CT 1/4/4/4/8/1; Minutes of the Water Works Committee, 2 February 1915, pp.49-51.
  - (60) 3/CT 1/4/4/4/8/1; Minutes 1914-1915, First Report from the Waterworks Committee in re Augmentation of Water Supply, p.67.
  - (61) Minute of the Mayor, 1915, pp.38-42.
  - (62) 3/CT 1/4/4/4/8/1; Minutes 1914-1915, First Report from the Waterworks Committee in re Augmentation of Water Supply, p.67.
  - (63) 3/CT 1/5/8/1/1, Augmentation of Water Supplies: Minutes 1915-1917, Meeting of the Special Committee in re augmentation of water supply, 5 May 1915, pp.1-2.



# MAP 7

## WATER SCHEMES PROPOSED WITHIN THE CAPE PENINSULA



### EXISTING SCHEMES (RED)

1 Table Valley Reservoirs

2 Woodhead Dam

### PROPOSED SCHEMES (YELLOW)

1 Disa River Reservoir

2 Woodhead Dam

The work of the special water committee differed from earlier investigations in that its work was more thorough and professional, due to the extensive use it made of the engineering and other professions. This was an indication that the city council attempted to avoid controversy, as well as accusations of vested interests, such as those which had arisen as a consequence of the amateurish explorations of hinterland schemes during the time of the Peninsula Commission.

In October 1915 a board of experts consisting of four engineers<sup>(64)</sup> issued a preliminary report outlining immediate measures that could be taken for short and long term solution to the water crisis. Firstly it was suggested that further small dams could be built within the Peninsula at Waai Kop on Table Mountain as well as in the Silvermine valley near Muizenberg, (see map 7 opposite page) as a short term, although expensive solution.<sup>(65)</sup> Furthermore, the development of additional reservoirs within the Peninsula would represent a drain on the city's capital, which would result in the postponement of the development of a hinterland scheme.<sup>(66)</sup> As an alternative, it was suggested that Cape Town enter into an agreement with Wynberg municipality to upgrade its reservoirs to the benefit of both municipalities.<sup>(67)</sup> Secondly, the engineer's report urged that extensive investigations be immediately undertaken at Wemmershoek; Steenbras; and the Berg River Hoek valleys as possible sites for a major dam as a long-term source of water supply.<sup>(68)</sup>

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(64) These included the city engineer, Mr. D.E. Lloyd-Davis; Thomas Stewart; Mr. W. Tait (British consultant); and an electrical engineer Mr. Heather.

(65) 3/CT 1/5/8/1/1; Report from a Special Committee in re: Augmentation of Water Supply, paragraph 11, 25, October 1915.

(66) *ibid.*

(67) *ibid.*

(68) *ibid.*

Given the high cost of building a reservoir at either Waai Kop or at Silvermine, the city council decided that the best short-term solution would be to approach Wynberg municipality with a plan to build a joint reservoir on one of their sites. This was estimated to cost about £195 000.<sup>(69)</sup> Although protracted negotiations between Cape Town and Wynberg took place from December 1915 until June 1916, that municipality saw no need for an additional water supply for the foreseeable future, and was reluctant to enter into a partnership with Cape Town despite the offer of favourable terms.<sup>(70)</sup> When it became clear that Wynberg had no intention of cooperating, the city once again turned its attention to Silvermine, with the reluctant approval of the Board of Engineers.<sup>(71)</sup>

While the development of a water scheme within the peninsula had been delayed, the two most promising hinterland sites at Wemmershoek and Steenbras were also threatened by numerous obstacles. The Wemmershoek site was restricted by the provisions of the Southern Suburbs Water Supply Act of 1907 which guaranteed comprehensive riparian rights to landowners along the valley.<sup>(72)</sup> Any dam built in that area would have been limited to providing only 1 million gallons of water a day unless the Act was amended by parliament. Approaches made towards the provincial authorities to support the amendment of the Act were thwarted by the government, because it would be ultra vires to the provisions of the 1912 Irrigation Act.<sup>(73)</sup> In addition to this it was expected that opposition to a private amendment bill from farmers possessing riparian rights, would have brought considerable delay to the scheme.<sup>(74)</sup>

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(69) Minute of the Mayor, 1916, p.35.

(70) 3/CT 1/5/8/1/1; Report from a Special Committee in re: Augmentation of Water Supply, paragraph 15-16,20, December 1915.

(71) *ibid.*

(72) 3/CT 1/5/8/1/1; Report from a Special Committee in re: Augmentation of Water Supply, paragraph 26.

(73) *ibid.*

(74) *ibid.*

The other promising site situated in the Steenbras valley similarly developed a number of problems. The municipality of Cape Town had inherited options to purchase farms in the valley from the former municipalities of Rondebosch and Mowbray, but it was discovered that these were practically worthless as a dam could not be built before land belonging to two speculators, the brothers A. and C. Struben, was acquired.<sup>(75)</sup> In March 1913 the Strubens approached the municipality of Cape Town with a proposal to supply the city with five million gallons a day as well as electricity from a hydro-electric scheme at a cost of £525 000.<sup>(76)</sup> While this private scheme had been rejected out of hand, the Strubens were determined to retain their water rights, and gambled that the municipality would be forced to pay the price they demanded.

While the two most promising hinterland sites were similarly handicapped by legal problems, they differed in their potential and cost,<sup>(77)</sup> (see table 10 below) which were significant for the council's final choice of a scheme.

TABLE 10

## COMPARISON OF THE PROPOSED WEMMERSHOEK AND STEENBRAS SCHEMES

	Wemmershoek	Steenbras
Total possible daily average supply (gallons)	40 000 000	15 000 000
Mean annual rainfall (inches)	76	48
Length of pipeline (miles)	44	38
Catchment area (sq miles)	34	23
Total cost for a scheme for 5 million gallons per day (£)	2 102 000	850 000

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(75) 3/CT 1/5/8/1/1; Report from a Special Committee in re: Augmentation of Water Supply, paragraph 26.

(76) *ibid.*

(77) Minute of the Mayor, 1917, pp.25-31.

At first it would appear that the Wemmershoek scheme was more suitable for the long term development of Cape Town's water supply. Although the development of a 5 million gallon a day scheme at Wemmershoek was estimated to cost nearly 2½ times as much as a similar size scheme at Steenbras, in the long term its daily supply could be increased to 40 million gallons compared to only 15 million gallons for its rival scheme. The increased capacity of Wemmershoek was subject to the repeal of the 1907 Southern Suburbs Water Supply Act with its guarantees of riparian rights. Another factor favouring Wemmershoek lay in the fact that its water supply was far purer than that of Steenbras whose water was a dark copper brown, discoloured by peaty soil and from the rotting palmiet reed.

Despite these drawbacks, the Steenbras scheme had the advantage of being far cheaper than the Wemmershoek scheme,<sup>(78)</sup> an important consideration within the context of a war time economy. Wemmershoek's greater distance from Cape Town meant that it required an additional 4500 tons of iron for pipes which was costly and difficult to transport during the war. In addition to this, the site in the Steenbras valley allowed for the construction of a far cheaper semi-permanent dam which could be upgraded after the war, while the Wemmershoek site demanded a costly masonry dam.<sup>(79)</sup> From the perspective of the city council and of the board of engineers, the Steenbras scheme was seen as the best choice given the city's financial constraints as well as the continuation of the war.

In April 1917 the Special Water Committee issued its final report in favour of the immediate development of the Steenbras scheme. It was decided that given the urgent need for water by all parts of the city, section 22 of the unification ordinance would be

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(78) Minute of the Mayor, 1917, pp.25-31.

(79) ibid.

repealed to enable the scheme to be financed by uniform rather than by differential rating.<sup>(80)</sup> To compensate for this the council approached the provincial authorities to empower the municipality to levy a special water rate at an amount of ½d. in the £. What the City Council did not anticipate, was widespread public opposition to the Steenbras scheme. A demand was made for a ratepayer's referendum on the issue. The outcome of this almost resulted in the scheme being abandoned in favour of the Wemmershoek site.

The extent of the opposition against the Steenbras scheme is difficult to understand if the conflict is viewed only as an isolated revolt against the dictates of the city hall. It represented the culmination of a long history of dissent over the city's water supply.

Opposition to Steenbras was sparked by plans to scrap clause 22 of the unification ordinance which gave ratepayers of the former Cape Town municipal area a degree of protection from financing water schemes for the suburb's benefit. A meeting of city ratepayers in July 1917<sup>(81)</sup> rejected the Steenbras scheme and called for a poll to decide the issue. The conflict went far beyond the scrapping of clause 22 and the introduction of a special water rate, or even the council's choice of the Steenbras Scheme, but drew upon a multitude of past issues, which were deeply embedded in the popular consciousness. Indeed, the many contradictions in the arguments for and against Steenbras can only be explained and understood in terms of those earlier struggles.

The main opposition to Steenbras was coordinated by the

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(80) 3/CT 1/5/8/1/1; Report from a Special Committee in re: Augmentation of Water Supply, paragraphs 30-31.

(81) Minute of the Mayor, 1917, p.32.

Citizen's Water Supply Committee.[CWSC] Although united against Steenbras, this body represented a loose alliance of different interests, drawn mainly from the middle and working classes. Amongst this group were those who supported the Wemmershoek scheme on the basis of the supposedly superior quality of its water. Others who fought against Steenbras's 'polluted' water, did not specifically campaign for Wemmershoek as an alternative scheme. Some in this group believed that sufficient water could still be obtained from Table Mountain, while others, drawn mainly from the former suburban municipalities, argued that Cape Town should continue to strive to reach an agreement with Wynberg municipality. Such a scheme, it was suggested, could serve as a "stopgap" until after the war, when a hinterland scheme could be afforded. The argument for economy drew widespread support, as both hinterland schemes had the problem of the high cost of importing iron pipeline at the height of the War.

The leadership of the Citizen's Water Supply Committee reflected these different interests at work. Those arguing for the Wynberg stopgap scheme were drawn mainly from the Rondebosch and Claremont wards, which lay in close proximity to that municipality. Included amongst this group were Frank Molteno, a former Claremont council member; Thomas Henshilwood, a Claremont merchant; and Charles Pearce, the MPC for Newlands.

Another major group within the CWSC consisted of the spokesmen of the working class. These included Albert Batty and Edward von Witt, both unsuccessful Labour Party candidates in the 1914 municipal elections.<sup>(82)</sup> Others were councillors representing working class wards: Isaac Honikman [East Central]; William Barton [Woodstock]; Alexander MacCullum [Castle], as well as Dr. Abdurahman, the MPC for Woodstock.<sup>(83)</sup> One of the most vocal of

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(82) Cape Times, 7 September 1914.

(83) Minute of the Mayor, 1917, List of councillors.

this latter group was William Black, who it will be remembered had been one of the supporters of the anti-water party in the 1906 municipal election, and who now championed the fight against Steenbras "in the interests of the poorer people in the community".<sup>(84)</sup>

Supporting the Steenbras Scheme was a rival Citizen's Steenbras Water Committee [CSWC], which represented the business interest, as well as the majority of city councillors, particularly those representing middle class wards. This organisation was strongly supported by the Cape Times, the Citizens' Guild and the Cape Town Publicity Association. The most vocal Steenbras supporters included William Duncan-Baxter, Frederick St Leger, John Parker, Sir William Thorne and J.W.Jagger, all of whom had a long association with the promotion of a hinterland scheme. The CSWC defended Steenbras on the grounds that the Wemmershoek Scheme or the Wynberg stopgap scheme were too costly in the short to medium term.<sup>(85)</sup> On the issue of Steenbras's discoloured water, the Committee garnered a wide range of support from leading doctors who assured the public that the water was not harmful.<sup>(86)</sup>

While the issues of cost and water quality were relatively clear cut, the inclusion of the working class on the side of those advocating the more costly Wemmershoek scheme is more difficult to explain. Although the CWSC was supported by a number of working class leaders, the majority of its leadership was drawn from the professional and middle classes. A close examination of the rhetoric of the working class leadership reveals that the basis of the opposition to Steenbras lay in their suspicion of the motives of the business classes controlling city hall, rather

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(84) Cape Times, 10 July 1917.

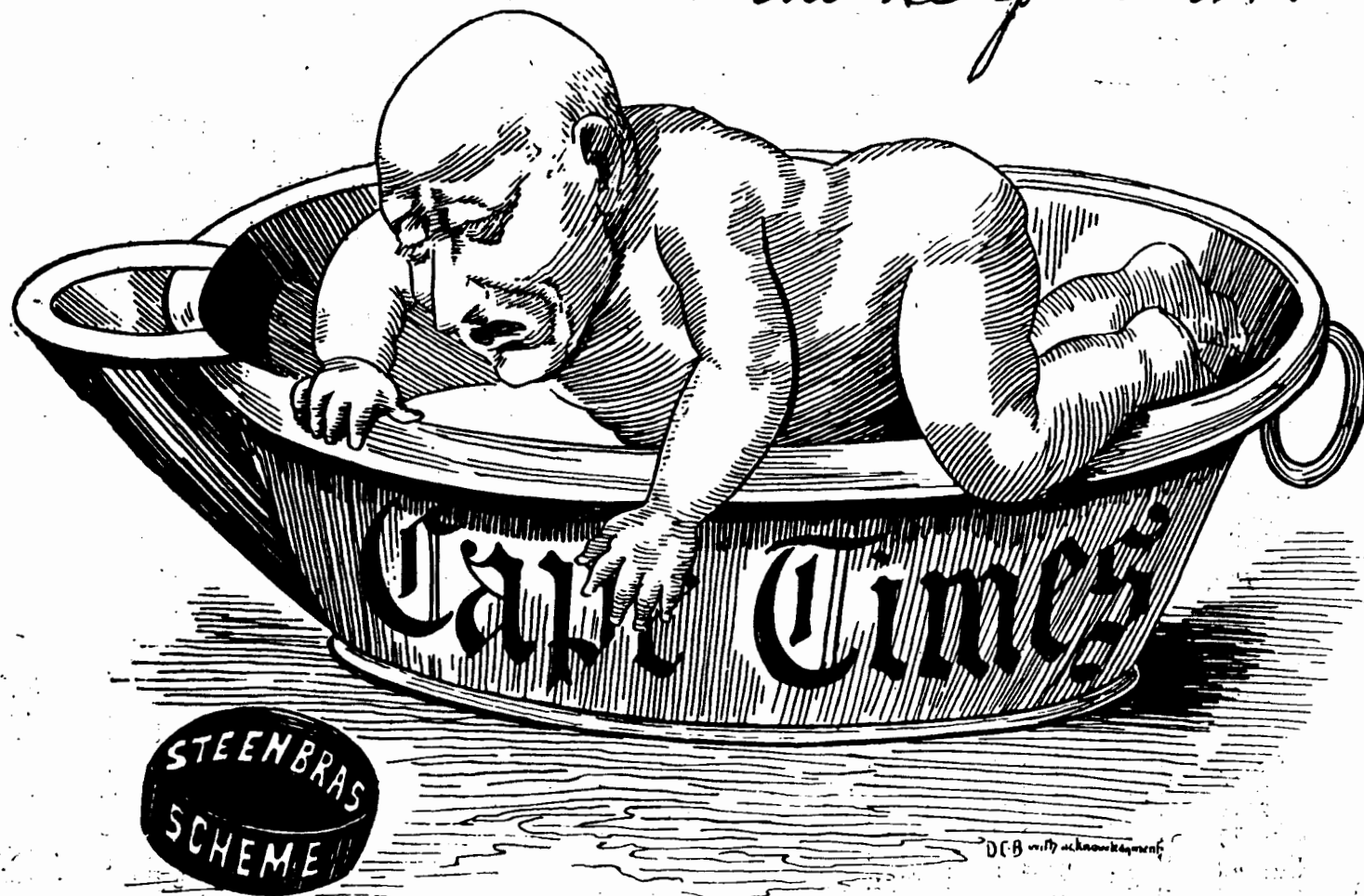
(85) Citizen's Steenbras Water Committee; More Points for Steenbras as against Wemmer's Hoek, (Pamphlet), 1917 [SAL]

(86) Citizen's Steenbras Water Committee, Doctors Say:- Steenbras is Right, 1917.



# THE WATER PROBLEM.

*He won't be happy  
till he gets it!*



CARTOON 16  
THE CAPE 13 JULY 1917

D.C.B. with acknowledgments

(With acknowledgments to the Proprietors of Pears' Soap.)

than opposition to the scheme itself. Thus in the words of one of the leaders of the anti- Steenbras campaign, the issue of 'Steenbras vs. Wemmershoek' came to represent one of "Gold vs. the People".<sup>(87)</sup> Another claim was that they "had wealth against them",<sup>(88)</sup> while S Eddy, the MPC for Rondebosch, described the campaign as one of the "press against the public".<sup>(89)</sup> The Cape, the only newspaper that took a relatively neutral view on the conflict, explained the phenomenon of working class opposition as distrust of the Citizens' Guild and its mouthpiece, the Cape Times, which it accused of "riding roughshod" over public opinion.<sup>(90)</sup> The Cape Times was seen to support Steenbras at all cost. In a cartoon parody of the famous Pear's advertisement, the editor of the Cape Times, Sir Maitland Park, was compared to the baby trying to get the Steenbras soap (see cartoon 16 facing page) The Cape went on to warn that:

"If the Steenbras scheme is defeated at the poll...much of the blame should fall on the shoulders of the petty politicians of the city hall who despise public opinion almost up to the moment when the vote went against Steenbras at the ratepayers meeting."<sup>(91)</sup>

In a similar vein the South African Review attacked the motives of the Citizen's Guild, which:

"professes to look after the ratepayers interests... [who it thinks of as] a well clad citizen with a gold watch and chain, and a motor car, and a rent roll....[It] is no place for the poor ratepayer who has to work for a living in some workshop, factory or office."<sup>(92)</sup>

Another vocal opponent of the council's scheme, Jasper Smith,

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(87) Cape Times, 18 July 1917.

(88) *ibid.*

(89) Cape Times, 21 July 1917.

(90) The Cape, 13 July 1917.

(91) *ibid.*

(92) South African Review, 22 June, 1917.

went further by arguing that the supposedly poor quality of Steenbras water would be:

"bad for health, bad for manufacturers, and, as ratepayers, bad for their pockets, because they did not know what it was [ultimately] going to cost".  
(93)

Despite of the Citizens' Water Supply Committee's mobilisation of householders and the city's working classes, the arguments of its leaders were sometimes contradictory. This illustrates that the campaign was not simply one of a conflict of class interests, but also included, for example, the old issue of conflicting interests between city and suburb. On the one hand the champions of the working class suggested that those who favoured Steenbras and the abolition of differential rating represented the suburban interest, a reference to the long-standing popular perception, that the city's businessmen living in the suburbs, intended to make the city ratepayers bear the cost of municipal improvements in the suburbs.<sup>(94)</sup> Others supporting the CWSC, particularly those drawn from the Southern Suburbs, saw Steenbras as in the city's interest, yet supported the council's attempt to abolish differential rating. Charles Pearce, the MPC for Newlands, complained that although the suburbs had entered into municipal unification because of "the prospects of a better water supply", they had in fact got "less water since union".<sup>(95)</sup>

Stephen Eddy, the MPC for Rondebosch accused Cape Town of not fulfilling its promises:

"If the suburbs had remained out of unification they would by now have had a water scheme though.... The suburbs had not benefited through unification, and had to pay their share of seaside pavilions and the like. The basis of the unification compromise has been an unjust one, and the suburbs had signed the agreement including differential rating, because if it were not for that, unification would not have been brought about. It was now only fair that the unjust clause should now be removed".<sup>(96)</sup>

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(93) Cape Times, 10 July 1917.

(94) It was suggested that water was needed for speculative building for the housing estates boom in the suburbs

(95) Cape Times, 15 July 1917.

(96) *ibid.*

# The Fateful Day!

Your decision to-day will influence the whole of your life and that of future generations.

**CITIZENS, TAKE THIS SERIOUSLY!**

If you have never voted before, let **NOTHING** prevent you doing so to-day.

You should have—and bequeath to your children's children—an unlimited supply of the purest water. To secure this—

**Vote AGAINST Steenbras To-day**

The alternative is an admittedly inferior water supply, which will cost, not £1,000,000 but £3,500,000, and which will be outgrown in less than 30 years.

**For the Sake of the Little Ones**  
**Vote AGAINST Steenbras To-day**

The fact that by 1917 the municipal rate for the Southern Suburbs had reached 4.5d in the Pound exceeding the rate of 4.2d for the city area had not been anticipated by the suburbs in 1912.<sup>(97)</sup> They had already borne the cost of the 1915 drainage scheme and suburban councillors were now unwilling to bear the additional cost of hinterland scheme on the basis of differential rating. This attitude was at variance with the spokesmen of the working class such as Albert Batty, Edward von Wit and William Black who perceived the move to abolish differential rating and introduce a special water rate as a move to make poorer householders pay for water needed by the city's elite.

The Steenbras Scheme was also attacked on a whole range of issues outside the sphere of class interest and city and suburban conflict. Thus Steenbras was emotively criticised by Jasper Smith on the grounds that it was 'unpatriotic' to consider such a scheme during the height of the war, and as such:

"A more awful crime has never been counted in the history of a municipality. Shall it go down to posterity that Cape Town is the only part of the Empire which failed in its duty, and that at the crisis of war Cape Town, instead of helping, actually hindered and blocked the supply of munitions by asking England to spare men and materials in order that we might get our water pipes".<sup>(98)</sup>

A major issue on which Steenbras was attacked was that of the perceived poor quality of its water. This played on fears of a recurrence of disease and plague. One advertisement in the press calling for the rejection of Steenbras, pleaded so, "For the sake of the little ones" and that such a decision would "influence the whole of your life and that of future generations".<sup>(99)</sup> (see facing page) Indeed, the issue of water and health was an important one, and the opinions of doctors were used by both

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(97) Minute of the Mayor, 1917, Report of the City Treasurer.

(98) Cape Times, 24 July 1917.

(99) Cape Times, 24 July 1917

sides to assure voters of the 'facts'. One medical practitioner, a supporter of Wemmershoek invoked biblical imagery in his criticism of the city council in a style reminiscent to that of Hyman Liberman in the 1906 municipal elections.

"The Town Council reminded him of the Children of Israel who in their wanderings through the wilderness suffered from want of water....Yet they set up a golden calf when their leader was up the mountain and turned from the Great Giver of all Good - but they were punished for it. The Great Giver offers unto us purest water in abundance...but we are asked to take second best".<sup>(100)</sup>

While the Citizens' Steenbras Water Committee took fright at the extent of the opposition, the city council had at least one powerful supporter, the Administrator of the Cape, Sir Frederick De Waal, on whose authority the repeal of section 22 of the unification ordinance rested. De Waal saw the lack of progress since unification as being due the "shadow" of "differential rating".<sup>(101)</sup> In a speech given before the Cape Provincial Council, De Waal drew attention to the duties of city government and to the dangers inherent if these were not carried out:

"The first thing a municipality must look after [is] drainage and water, these things [are] of more importance than a beautiful City Hall, a fine pier, or a splendid orchestra. The City once had a bubonic plague, and it cost the Government half a million [Pounds] to eradicate it".<sup>(102)</sup>

As far as De Waal was concerned the Unification Ordinance was not an "absolutely agreed upon Bill" as:

"the great bogey to unification had been that a certain water scheme might be forced on an unwilling section of the ratepayers, and for that reason the principles of differential rating had been introduced".<sup>(103)</sup>

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(100) Cape Times, 24 July 1917.

(101) Cape Times, 7 July 1917.

(102) *ibid.*

(103) *ibid.*

ERNEST ST. GEORGE

14 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, 40, 45, 50, 55, 60, 65, 70, 75, 80, 85, 90, 95, 100

RAILWAY

10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80, 90, 100

Popular Prices 1/6, 2/6, 3/6, 4/6, 5/6, 6/6, 7/6, 8/6, 9/6, 10/6

at the Theatre

Underwear

VESTS 3/6

PANTS 3/11

10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80, 90, 100

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MASS  
MEETING  
OF  
CITIZENS

IN SUPPORT OF

Steenbras  
Water  
Scheme

AT THE

CITY HALL,  
TUESDAY,

24th July, 1917,

At 8 p.m.

SPEAKERS:

MR. FREDERICK SMITH, M.L.A.

(Chairman).

THE HON. SIR DAVID DE VILLIERS

GRAFF, Esq., M.L.A.

THE MAYOR (MR. H. HANDEL).

THE DEPUTY MAYOR (MR. E. J.

VENSTER).

DR. WATERSTON, M.D.

MR. R. R. BRYDGES, J.P.

MR. J. W. JACOBSON, M.L.A.

MR. W. DUNCAN BAXTER, M.L.A.

MR. JOHN PARKER, F.E.L.R.A.

MR. JOHN BARNARD FOLLER, M.D.

Come and Hear Why

You Should Vote for

Steenbras

AT THE

Poll on Wednesday

THE

LOAN of

MOTOR

CARS

ON POLLING DAY.

Wednesday,

25th instant.

CITIZENS and Friends of the

Pure Water Campaign are

earnestly requested to offer

Motors and other conveyances to

bring Voters to the Poll. Please

notify the Committee at Mr. Joseph

Smith's, 704, St. George's Street.

HELPERS CORDIALLY

INVITED.

SAY "NO"

TO

STEENBRAS

WATER SCHEME

AT THE

CITY HALL

TUESDAY,

24th July, 1917,

At 8 p.m.

3 ACTS.

To read the crash at 8.45, patrons

are kindly requested to

COME EARLY.

At 8.45, the following

will be held in the NEWBURY TOWER

HALL, 100, NEWBURY STREET, N.E.

At 8.45, the following

To Discuss the Water

Question.

Chairman: Dr. L. A. W. Bell

Speakers: Mr. Frank Molloy, Dr. C. F.

J. Murray.

OUR PROGRAMME:

Go to Wembley by the earliest possible

train and Wembley - back for the bus

at 10.15, pure water supply.

Say "NO" to

Steenbras.

Organised by Claremont Ratepayers'

Water Committee.

A

Gigantic

Effort

Will be made to secure for

the people a pure, clean

Water Supply by a

PUBLIC

MEETING

IN THE

CITY HALL

TO-NIGHT

at 8 o'clock.

SPEAKERS:

Dr. Symington,

Dr. C. F. K. Murray,

Dr. Forsyth,

Dr. Abdurahman,

F. Molteno, Esq.

J. W. Mushet, Esq.

W. Black, Esq.

A. Benning, Esq.

H. Jasper Smith, Esq.

A. F. Batty, Esq.

Mr. Councillor Barton will

make his reasons for voting

AGAINST Steenbras.

CHAIRMAN:

W. T. Buissinne, Esq.

CITIZENS!

Arrive in Your Night

at 8.45

Say "NO"

TO

STEENBRAS

WATER SCHEME

AT THE

CITY HALL

TUESDAY,

24th July, 1917,

At 8 p.m.

Steenbras

MEETINGS

STeenbras

Water Scheme

TO-NIGHT

(MONDAY)

At 8 o'clock

PARISH HALL, KALE

Speakers:

Mr. DAVID DEAN (Chairman)

Councillors H. J. DAWSON,

GENTRY, and G. C. STODOL.

St. PATRICK HALL,

SOMER ET ROAD

Speakers:

Mr. LAWRENCE WOODHEAD,

M.L.A. (Chairman)

Councillors R. J. TROTTER (Mayor),

Mr. C. W. A. COULDER, Mr. J. J.

SERRICURIE and Mr. J. C. STEWART.

WESLEY HALL,

OBSERVATORY ROAD.

Speakers:

Mr. W. DUNCAN BAXTER, M.L.A.

Dr. MATTHEW HEWAT, Councillor

Mr. R. E. REID and Mr. C. JACOBSON, M.L.A.

Members: C. W. STEWARD, H. HEP-

BURN, BRIGHT T. McKENZIE and

ARTHUR WIGOT.

St. MARK'S SCHOOLROOM

TENNANT STREET.

Speakers:

Mr. T. PROGRAM (Chairman), the

MAYOR (Mr. H. HANDEL), Mr. J. M.

BROWN, and Councillors H. J.

STODOL, J. BUCHANAN.

BROOKLYN MISSION HALL

MAITLAND WARD.

Speakers:

Mr. A. H. BULLEN, Mr. BOTTEN-

DY, Councillors T. B. BERTON,

M. A. O. DALL, and C. G. SYDOW,

and Mr. E. G. NYMAN.

Come and hear why you

should

VOTE FOR STEENBRAS

at the

POLL ON WEDNESDAY.

Read What

LT-Col.

Dr. JOHN HEWAT

says

In

Support

of

Wemmer's

Hoek

LT-Col. Dr. JOHN HEWAT

M.L.A. says

"I have no objection to any

kind of water supply, but I

think water from a mountain

is superior to any other water

of any kind."

Mr. J. J. DAWSON, Councillor

Mr. C. W. A. COULDER, Councillor

Mr. J. J. DAWSON, Councillor

Mr. C. W. A. COULDER, Councillor

De Waal suggested that if differential rating divided the southern suburbs and Cape Town and stood in the way of water, then it would have to be amended.<sup>(104)</sup>

The water referendum took on the proportions of a general election, with dozens of different pamphlets being issued,<sup>(105)</sup> scores of public meetings held and hundreds of advertisements placed in the press, as may be seen from the leader page of the Cape Times.(see facing page) The CWSC and CSWC conducted ruthless and emotive campaigns in order to solicit the support of ratepayers. Alfred Batty complained that CSWC was intimidating ratepayers:

"Terrible things...were being told. [if the ratepayers were to reject Steenbras] They were told that the capital would be moved from Cape Town, and that the Council would resign, [and] that the Labour Party would capture the Council".<sup>(106)</sup>

Both sides were far from honest, the evidence of the Board of Engineers Report was manipulated, financial statements were misquoted and a variety of contradictory expert opinion was paraded before the electorate in the weeks preceding this extraordinary referendum.

In spite of fears that the Steenbras scheme would be lost because of massive working class mobilisation against it, the referendum resulted in a narrow victory for the Citizen's Steenbras Water Committee. The result of the poll showed 8006 votes for Steenbras as against 6905 for Wemmershoek; a majority of 1101

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(104) Cape Times, 7 July 1917.

(105) Citizen's Steenbras Water Committee: "Steenbras is Right"; "Doctors Say: Steenbras is Right"; "Steenbras vs. Wemmer's Hoek"; "Steenbras versus Wemmer's Hoek: The Facts"; and "More Points for Steenbras as against Wemmer's Hoek". Citizen's Water Supply Committee: "Steenbras or Wemmer's-Hoek"; "Steenbras Why?"; "Think of these True Facts about Wemmer's Hoek"; and "What Ten Councillors said about Wemmer's Hoek".

(106) Cape Times, 4 July 1917.



MAP 8

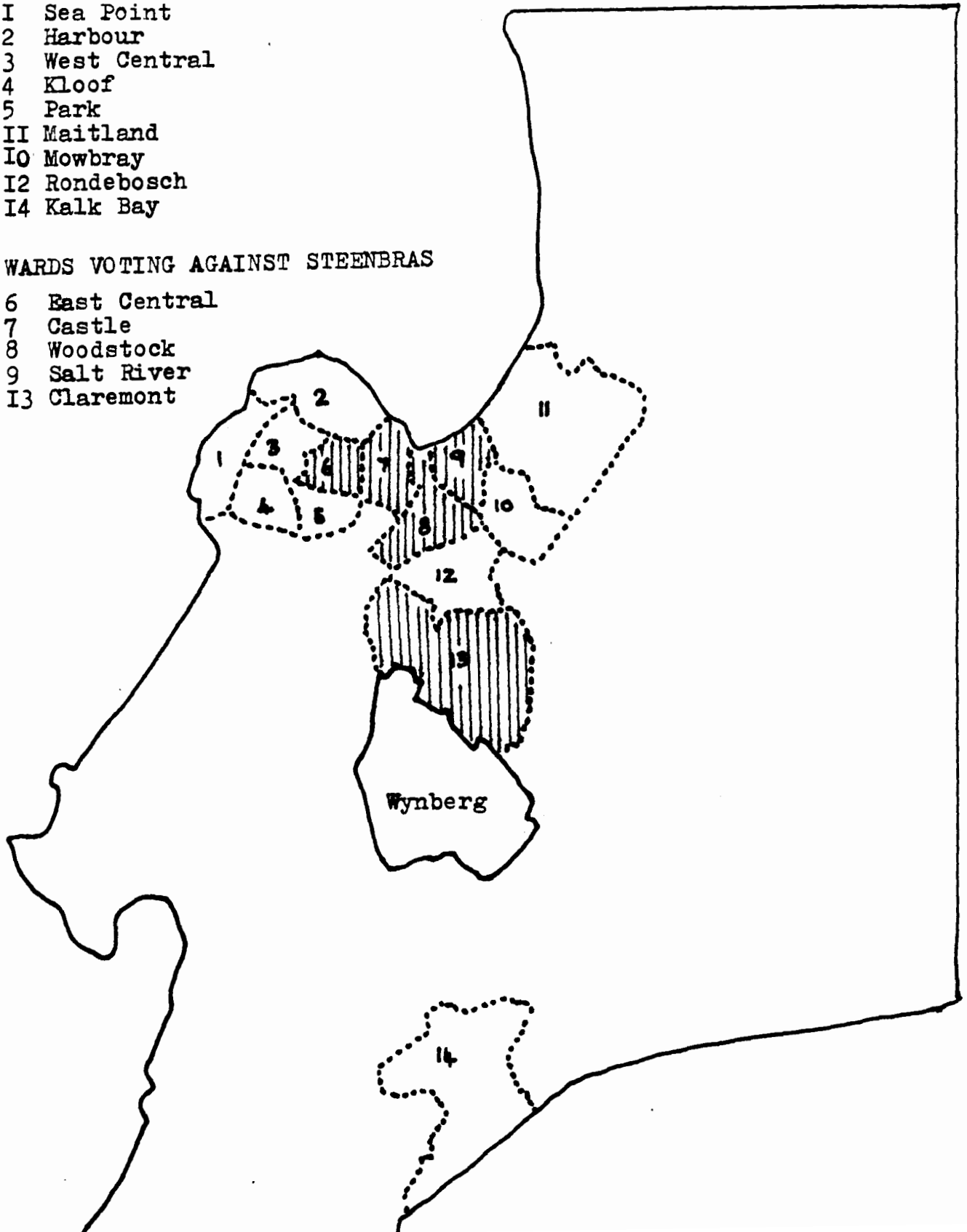
1917 WATER REFERENDUM

WARDS VOTING FOR STEENBRAS

- I Sea Point
- 2 Harbour
- 3 West Central
- 4 Kloof
- 5 Park
- II Maitland
- IO Mowbray
- I2 Rondebosch
- I4 Kalk Bay

WARDS VOTING AGAINST STEENBRAS

- 6 East Central
- 7 Castle
- 8 Woodstock
- 9 Salt River
- I3 Claremont



votes.<sup>(107)</sup> The actual margin was much narrower than it first appears. The existence of a plural voting system skewed the result in the favour of the more affluent ratepayers who had up to three votes. Based on actual voter turnout, only 4835 people voted for Steenbras while 4929 voted for Wemmershoek. On a straight vote, Steenbras would have been defeated by 94 votes.<sup>(108)</sup> Furthermore the results showed that the four predominantly working class wards of East Central City, Castle, Woodstock and Salt River voted overwhelmingly against Steenbras.<sup>(109)</sup> ( see map 8 facing page) The only other ward to vote against Steenbras was Claremont, presumably due to its close proximity to Wynberg. Since it had become apparent that Cape Town was to proceed with a hinterland scheme, Wynberg softened its isolationist stance, and was eager to engage in a cooperative scheme with Cape Town.

One result of the Steenbras referendum was that it finally brought an end to a period of over forty years during which the issue of water supply had played an important role in Cape Town's municipal history. Yet at this juncture, the 1917 referendum also reflects many of the earlier conflicts; such as between the rentier classes and merchants over municipal reform and sanitation, between businessmen and householders over municipal spending, the conflicting interests between city and suburb as well as the wider emergence of class conflict during this period.

Although the central issue in the 1917 water referendum concerned that of the comparative cost of the rival water schemes, the significant support given to Wemmershoek by working class ratepayers, who had a history of rejecting costly water schemes,

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(107) Cape Times, 24 July 1917.

(108) South African Review, 27 July 1917.

(109) Cape Times, 24 July 1917.

indicates the referendum reflects far deeper issues. One of these concerns that of working class suspicion of the motives of the businessmen and the middle classes of the suburbs, as is embodied in the accusation of "gold vs. the people".

This reaction was rooted in the popular perception of the issue of water supply as a symbol of the middle class struggle for municipal reform for over fifty years. As the most expensive aspect of municipal reform, the question of water supply, particularly hinterland schemes, were seen as the prerogative of businessmen and the suburban middle class. The origins of these perceptions may lie in the political upheavals of the 1880's, when advocates of reform such as the Cape Times estranged the city's underclass through its persistent definition of them as 'dirty' people who were branded as enemies of municipal reform who had no interest in the provision of water or sanitation.

Similarly, in the 1900's working class householders rallied against John Parker's attempt to develop a hinterland water scheme as this was seen to be to the benefit of 'suburban interests' and not those of the city. Even by 1913, the suspicion of a 'big water scheme' continued to plague the process of municipal unification, which was seen in certain quarters as being against the interest of Cape Town.

The fact that the 1917 conflict arose at all, is largely the result of the terms of municipal unification, an agreement that was partly shaped by the issue of water supply. Indeed it has been seen that water supply, which was one of the main motives for unification, was not resolved by this agreement.

The 1917 referendum, as in the case of the earlier water related conflicts, illustrates that the whole issue of municipal reform,



PHOTOGRAPH II  
STEENBRAS DAM c.1919

unification and water supply were not simply the product of the will of a monolithic ruling class, but were the result of a process of conflicting interests, between ratepayers, amongst businessmen and the professional classes, within the city hall, between city and suburban interests and through conflicting class interests.

It is perhaps not surprising that the acceptance of the Steenbras did not bring an immediate end to Cape Town's water crisis. The Steenbras scheme represented the biggest municipal undertaking in South Africa at that time. Contracts for its construction, which included a forty mile pipeline, were only signed in 1918 after the war.<sup>(110)</sup> During this interim period the water crisis deepened to such an extent that water was rationed and cut off for twenty hours a day.<sup>(111)</sup> Work on the scheme was speeded up to enable its completion in 1921.<sup>(112)</sup> (see photograph 12 facing page) Within two years of the inauguration of the scheme it was found that the supply was insufficient, due to increased consumption and a period of protracted drought. Such was the frustration that calls were made for the scheme to be abandoned and for government to provide aid for a new scheme elsewhere.<sup>(113)</sup>

It was decided to enlarge the dam by raising its walls, thereby increasing its capacity from 600 million gallons to 5 991 million gallons, almost ten times that of the original scheme at a cost of over a £1 000 000. <sup>(114)</sup>

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(110) Cape Town City Council; Steenbras Water Scheme, Contract no.2, Tunnel and Approaches, 1917.

(111) J.Burman, The Cape of Good Intent, 1969, p.112.

(112) Souvenir of the inauguration of the Steenbras water scheme by H.R.H Prince Arthur of Connaught, 9 March 1921.

(113) *ibid.*

(114) *ibid.*

While the Steenbras scheme was not the last of Cape Town's dams, it nevertheless represents the end of a period in which the issue of water supply was to interact with municipal politics, which may justifiably be called the era of the politics of water supply.

PHOTOGRAPHY I2

AN EARLY AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH OF THE TABLE MOUNTAIN DAMS  
c. 1920



CAPE ARCHIVES: AG 6530

## CHAPTER 4

### PARISH PUMP POLITICS?

#### CAPE TOWN'S WATER SUPPLY PAST AND PRESENT

From today's perspective it is perhaps difficult to appreciate the degree to which the process of augmenting water supply has shaped the development of Cape Town's early municipal government. Apart from minor water restrictions in the 1950's and 1970's, water supply has been taken for granted in the recent past. The cost of augmenting supplies are no longer borne entirely by municipal government but is shared by the state, reducing the economic impact on ratepayers. No longer does the massive cost of extending supplies bring political turmoil. In this final chapter the relevance of the issue of water supply is evaluated, and placed within the broader context of Cape Town's history, elevating it from its conventional relegation under the heading of parish pump politics.

A recurring theme of this dissertation concerns the political and social repercussions brought about by the high cost of water supply. Less emphasis has been given to the related aspects of sanitation reform, such sewers and drains, or to its connection to the imposition of segregation and class control, as have been examined by Bickford-Smith, Van Heyningen and others.<sup>(1)</sup> This

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(1) For example: V. Bickford-Smith, "Commerce, class and ethnicity in Cape Town, 1875-1902", Ph.D. thesis, University of Cambridge, 1988; E.B. van Heyningen, "Public Health and Society in Cape Town, 1880-1910", Ph.D. thesis, University of Cape Town, 1989; and also M.W. Swanson, "The sanitation Syndrome", Journal of African History, Volume 18, No.3, 1977, pp.387-410.



chapter therefore attempts to locate the narrow aspect of water supply within these broader debates and to evaluate its overall importance and significance within the context of an urban history of Cape Town.

Accepting that the issue of water supply was a significant factor in Cape Town's history, this chapter examines the extent which water affected the development of South African and other cities. It must be established whether the role of water within Cape Town is unique or if it is a common factor that must be applied to the equation that makes up urban history.

It is with this in mind that this chapter draws comparisons from the experience of cities outside South Africa in an attempt to develop a model for understanding the role of water supply by placing it within the context of the social, political and economic conflicts typical of a city in transition.

#### THE ISSUE OF WATER SUPPLY WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF CAPE TOWN'S URBAN HISTORY: 1840-1920

While this dissertation covers a broad period in Cape Town's history, it nevertheless represents a coherent phase, not only in terms of the development of its water supply, but also in relation to its transformation from a pre-industrial colonial town to a modern industrialising city. During this period Cape Town experienced a process of fundamental economic, social and political change that altered the structure and function of its society. The position and importance of the issue of water supply is therefore subordinate to these greater forces.

The period covered by this dissertation also falls within the

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scope of three recent historical studies of Cape Town which examine various aspects of social, political and economic change which coincide or overlap with the issue of water supply. When these are correlated with the various conflicts involving water, the beginnings of an integrated interpretation of Cape Town's municipal history may be discerned.

In terms of municipal politics, Digby Warren's examination of the Board of Commissioners and Wardmasters between 1840 and 1854<sup>(2)</sup> and Vivian Bickford-Smith's<sup>(3)</sup> study of the ascendancy of the municipal reformers between 1875 and 1902, represent part of an ongoing pattern of conflict for control over Cape Town's government by classes who sought to serve their interests through the domination of the council. A recurring feature of these conflicts was the prominence of water supply, a consequence of the fact that it touched upon numerous aspects of everyday existence.

It has been established that the lack of water adversely effected two areas of Cape Town's life. Firstly it was essential for trade and commerce, and the of supply shipping and industry. Secondly it was a central aspect of sanitation reform, and was needed for the proper functioning of drains and sewers in order to combat disease and epidemics. While these were the motives for improving supplies, the inherent reason for water being at the site of conflict was that it represented an enormous source expenditure. For a municipality with limited revenue it generated political discord within the town council.

Warren describes the rise of the rentier classes, householders

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- (2) D. Warren, "Merchant's, Commissioners and wardmasters: Municipal Politics in Cape Town, 1840-1954", MA dissertation, University of Cape Town, 1986.
- (3) V. Bickford-Smith, "Commerce, class and ethnicity" .

and small businessmen in the 1840's and 1850's. This group came into conflict with the elite merchant classes, whose influence over the Town House they sought to reduce. In this objective they were united by a common desire of keeping municipal expenditure to a minimum. In Chapter One it is shown that this objective conflicted with the concept of effective local government. By the late 1850's, an attempt was made on the part of the mercantile elite as well as sections of the commercial and professional classes to reverse the influence of the rentier class and their allies amongst the Board of Commissioners. While the re-emergence of divisions amongst the dominant classes had their origins in wider political differences such as the convict crisis of 1849 and the franchise question of 1853, they soon manifested themselves within local government. In Chapter One it was argued that an acute water and sanitation crisis and the outbreak of smallpox in the late 1850's, presented an opportunity for the mercantile elite to challenge the structure of municipal government and attempt to divide its authority. The most important example of this was the drive for of an independent water board to facilitate water and sanitation reforms. This challenge was further aided by divisions that arose between the Wardmasters and Commissioners, when the latter tried to abolish the position of wardmaster in the new municipal ordinance which was due to be enacted in 1860.

The period from the late 1850's to the early 1860's was one in which local government was torn between opposing forces that either wanted to centralise municipal power or to dilute it. But the merchant interests were not yet in a powerful enough position to make a direct political challenge, and the Commissioners succeeded in consolidating power with the institution of the town council in 1867.

It was not until the 1870's that the mercantile elite and their

adherents in the professional and commercial classes again attempted to reform Cape Town's municipal government. The issue of water supply and sanitation were similarly at the centre of this conflict, but the supporters of municipal reform now sought to extend their influence within the Town House by seeking election to the council. It was not until the early 1880's that reformers were in a position to make an all out bid for the control of the municipality. A water and sanitation crisis, the outbreak of a smallpox epidemic and the bungling of the construction of the Molteno Reservoir provided an opportunity for the clean party to defeat the dirty party in the municipal elections of 1882.

The ascendancy of the clean party is related to the underlying changes that had been taking place in Cape Town's economy from about 1875. The shift in the town's economic function as an administrative centre and port for agricultural produce to that of a commercial and industrial city, placed new demands on municipal government and brought its structure and function into question. This was to undermine the political hegemony of the rentier classes and the property based economy.

The ascendance of merchant capital in the town council was not a sudden event nor was it completed in the 1880's. The raising of large municipal loans for a water supply scheme and sanitation system gave rise to resistance from householders and property owners in the late 1890's. While the reformers succeeded in staving off a challenge from the 'wreckers' in 1897, after the turn of the century an informal alliance of small businessmen and householders managed to gain control over the town council. This was accomplished mobilising ratepayers against a proposed hinterland water scheme and the question of Cape Town's cooperation with the suburbs. As a consequence of the erosion of their power in the 1904 and 1905 elections, the old merchant reformers began to redefine their role in municipal government.

The formation of the Citizen's Guild in 1906, which aimed to re-establish control over City hall, represents the emergence of a modern business elite within Cape Town's government. Increasingly this group sought to place the city's municipal government on a more professional footing, and accepted that its political integration with the suburbs was necessary to address the Cape Peninsula's social and economic problems.

While the above analysis correlates the rise and fall of the various fractions of the dominant classes with the economics of water and sanitation reform, the development of water supply must be linked to the wider social and political changes taking place at this time. Central to this is Vivian Bickford-Smith's study of commerce, class and ethnicity<sup>(4)</sup> and Elizabeth van Heyningen's examination of public health and society.<sup>(5)</sup> Both are concerned with the last quarter of nineteenth-century Cape Town, and give prominence to the issue of class and race in the context of municipal and social reform. It is argued that the question of sanitation and disease were central in the battle for political control of the city. As an adjunct to both sanitation and public health, the issue of water supply was similarly locked into this battle for control. Unlike the issue of sanitation, the quest to augment water supply came to be strongly associated with merchant interests, and for this reason it became the focus of attention in the reaction against reform, particularly on the part of the working class.

The working class's perception of water supply as the prerogative of the dominant class may at first appear to be a contradiction, given that the lack of an adequate supply was a major reason for disease and high mortality rates amongst that section of the

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(4) V. Bickford-Smith, "Commerce, class and ethnicity".

(5) E.B. van Heyningen, "Public Health and Society".

population. It could be expected that while merchants would have benefited from regular supplies to commerce and shipping, so too would benefits have accrued to the working classes. This assumption must be questioned as the link between health and water supply had only begun to be fully appreciated by medical doctors let alone by those who lived in the most squalid parts of Cape Town. Furthermore, it may be argued that working class's perception of the reformer's priorities may have been justified, for in retrospect, the process of augmenting water supply brought little benefit in terms of improved health or falling mortality rates.<sup>(6)</sup>

Another reason for the working class's opposition to water schemes arises from their close political association with the rentier classes in the latter half of the nineteenth century. During this period expenditure on water was rejected on the basis that it would result in an increase in municipal rates, which would in turn be reflected in rising rents, or in the introduction of a tenants rate. It has also been suggested that the alliance between coloured ratepayers and especially the Dutch-speaking landlords and Commissioners was also based on their common desire for a low economic franchise with the establishment of the Cape Parliament in 1853.

In the mid-1850's, calls for the augmentation of water supply by English-speaking merchants on the behalf the working classes, seem to have been ignored by these ratepayers. By the late 1870's similar calls for water supply on humanitarian grounds had diminished considerably, as the working classes increasingly came to be seen as a political obstacle to municipal and social reform. Epidemics that swept through the town's slums came to be

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(6) P. Buirski, "Mortality Rates in Cape Town, 1895-1980, A Broad Outline", Studies in the History of Cape Town, Volume 5, eds. C. Saunders et.al., University of Cape Town, pp.125-132, 1984.

seen as a direct threat to the middle classes. Working class support for the representatives of property owners was seen to underpin the dirty party's control of the Town House, thus blocking attempts at reform. The English press sought to unhinge this alliance in its attack on the dirty party. In an attempt to mobilise English-speaking middle classes, its supporters were isolated through the use of stereotypes of dirty Moslems and/or Malays and attacks on Dutch speakers as foreign and uncouth.

Once they had gained control over the Town House in 1882, the reformers or Clean Party sought to reduce the influence of the mainly coloured working class by narrowing the municipal franchise. Furthermore, opposition to excessive spending on water and sanitation schemes in the 1890's and early twentieth century was met by similar attempts to isolate working class ratepayers through use of racial stereotypes which fed on middle class fears of disease and disorder.<sup>(7)</sup> These fears were to thrive on the fertile ground of change as Cape Town underwent a period of rapid urbanisation, immigration and industrialisation.

As a consequence of the political and social isolation of the coloured working class, the reformers attempt to augment water supply in the early twentieth century were met with resistance from the poor whose perception of water as an interest of the merchant and middle classes had been gradually reinforced by the rhetoric of sanitation and reform. This found its expression between 1904 and 1906 when businessmen who proposed economy in municipal spending, gained control of the town council by mobilising householders and the working classes against the proposed hinterland water schemes. Similarly, opposition was expressed against cooperation with the suburbs and later to

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(7) V. Bickford-Smith, "Dangerous Cape Town: Middle-class Attitudes to Poverty in Cape Town in the Late Nineteenth Century", Studies in the History of Cape Town, Volume 4, eds. C. Saunders et.al., University of Cape Town, pp.29-65, 1984.

municipal unification as this too was perceived to be to the benefit of the Adderley Street interest.

After unification in 1913, working class opposition to a water scheme in the hinterland once again became the focus of a political conflict within the council. It was argued in Chapter Three that working class opposition to the cheaper Steenbras water scheme in the 1917 municipal referendum, can be explained in terms of their long-standing perception of the dominant class's self-interest.

The development of Cape Town's water supply between the 1850's and 1920 is therefore closely bound up with the wider changes being brought about by a society in the process of social, political and economic transition. The augmentation of water supply was not only the product of a struggle within the dominant class, but was also shaped by the reaction of the working classes against a process of reform that was not seen to be in their interest. The working class reaction against sanitation reform had taken on many forms such as the cemetery riots and revolt against smallpox vaccination in the nineteenth century.<sup>(8)</sup> In the case of water supply, the Table Mountain dams and hinterland schemes symbolised yet another aspect of the self concern of the dominant classes, which was perhaps made more poignant by the fact that many of the houses in District Six remained without running water until the early twentieth century.

It can be seen that the issue of water supply in Cape Town during this period impacted on the municipality's development and interacted in the process of the transformation of its economy

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(8) A. Davids, "'The Revolt of the Malays', A Study of the Reactions of the Cape Muslims to the Smallpox Epidemics of Nineteenth Century Cape Town", Studies in the History of Cape Town, Volume 5, eds. C. Saunders et.al., University of Cape Town, pp.46-78.



and society. It must now be considered if the impact of water supply is unique to Cape Town or if it must be considered an ingredient of all towns experiencing process of change.

#### WATER SUPPLY AND URBAN HISTORY

In the introduction to this dissertation it was argued that Cape Town's environmental and geographic situation placed it in a comparatively difficult position to augment its water supplies in comparison to other major cities of the world. It was argued that British cities such as Birmingham, Manchester, Leicester, Nottingham and Derby faced similar problems in bringing in water over long distances.<sup>(9)</sup> It was suggested that it was not distance but the type of water resource available that determined how water supply and sanitation systems evolved. Defined as a 'salt water city', Cape Town had the benefit of being able to dispose of its sewage at sea without contaminating rivers which provided drinking water.<sup>(10)</sup> Cape Town's position was also similar to that of 'minor river' cities which had to draw water from multiple sources, at considerable expense.<sup>(11)</sup> The issue to be considered however is not simply the availability of water, but the political trauma that is generated when supplies suddenly have to be augmented to meet the demands of rapid growth and

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(9) P.J. Waller, Town, City, and Nation, England 1850-1914, 1983, p.302. Waller gives the following examples of distance between cities and their source of water supply: Liverpool(50 miles); Birmingham (70 miles); Manchester (80 miles); Leicester(60 miles); Nottingham (40 miles); Derby (35 miles).

(10) L.P. Cain, "An Economic History of Urban Location and Sanitation", P. Uselding (editor), Research in Economic History, University of Illinois, Volume 2, 1977, p.342.

(11) *ibid.*, p.344.

industrialisation. The problem was more than matching demand but meeting the requirements of rising standards living.<sup>(12)</sup>

Cities such as Johannesburg, Kimberley and Durban experienced periods of rapid growth which demanded an increase in water supply to facilitate industrialisation and improvement in living conditions. In the case of Johannesburg and Kimberley water was controlled either by private water companies or by independent water authorities, thus obviating political conflict at the site of municipal government. The restricted municipal franchise in these and other cities deadened the resistance of the working classes to reform, whereas in Cape Town they first had to be isolated and neutralised before sanitation reforms were allowed to proceed relatively unhindered.

The cities of Great Britain and its colonies on the other hand do reveal many similarities with Cape Town's experience of water and sanitation reform but the added racial dimension and the colonial context makes Cape Town's experience somewhat different. The conflict arising from Liverpool's Rivington Pike scheme bears remarkable similarities with regard to the divisions that were created within its municipal government. Indeed many aspects of the development of water supply in a variety of British town's correspond to Cape Town's experience even though there are important differences.

The experience of towns and cities in British colonies as well as the United States concerned conflicts between water companies and municipalities as the latter attempted to take over their function where supplies were inefficient and costly.<sup>(13)</sup> In

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(12) L.P.Cain, "An Economic History of Urban Location", p.203.

(13) E. Jones and D. McCalla, "Toronto waterworks, 1840-77: Continuity and Change in Nineteenth-Century Toronto Politics", Canadian Historical Review, Volume LX, Number 3, 1979, pp. 300-323.

Britain this was the experience of Exeter, Sheffield, Bradford, Rochdale, Bolton, Leeds, Liverpool and London.<sup>(14)</sup> The substance of these conflicts involved the ascendance of men supporting municipalisation against the old landed and merchant interests who often had invested in these companies. Once reformists had gained control over town councils, lengthy and often expensive battles were waged against water companies unwilling to surrender their water rights. Waller has pointed out that municipal purchase of water companies was wasteful and that ratepayers "literally paid for a principle" in the drive for municipalisation.<sup>(15)</sup> While this aspect of the history of water supply is absent in Cape Town, equivalent struggles took place in towns such as Kimberley,<sup>(16)</sup> and even in the Cape Peninsula, as with the suburban municipalities conflict with the Cape Town District Water Company at the close of the nineteenth century.<sup>(17)</sup> As water companies became dislodged from their positions in British cities, investors often turned to the colonies. Sir Henry Knight, the chairman of London's Southwark

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- (14) For examples of Exeter, Sheffield and Bradford, see A. Elliot, "Municipal Government in Bradford in the mid-nineteenth century", D.Fraser (ed.), Municipal Reform and the Industrial City, 1983, pp.119-122; For Rochdale and Bolton see J.Garrard, Leadership and power in Victorian Industrial Towns, 1983, pp.91-93; for Leeds see B.Barber, "Municipal Government in Leeds, 1835-1914", D.Fraser (ed.), Municipal reform and the Industrial City, 1983, pp.85-89; for Liverpool see D.Fraser, Power and Authority in the Victorian City, 1979, pp.31-36; and for London see D.Owen, The Government of Victorian London 1855-1889: The Metropolitan Board of Works, the Vestries and the City Corporation, 1982, pp.134-141.
  - (15) P.J. Waller, Town, City and Nation, p.307.
  - (16) B. Roberts, Civic Century, The first one hundred years of the Kimberley municipality, 1978, p.18, p.25. The municipality attempted to purchase the Griqualand West Water Company in 1879, but due to its lack of finance it was forced to enter an agreement lasting 25 years. When this contract expired in 1905, it was extended until 1921, when the municipality finally took over the company.
  - (17) SMW ADD 1/42-44, Papers re: Cape Town District Waterworks Company Ltd, versus Woodstock and Claremont Municipalities re taking over of Waterworks arbitration case, 1897-1900.

scheme, claimed that this provided a reliable source of income due to the fact that there were few financial failures.<sup>(18)</sup>

In general Cape Town's experience was opposite from that of most British cities, as water supply had always been under the control of the local government. At times the municipality was seen to be incompetent to meet the demand for increased supply. This gave rise to attempts to remove its power over the waterworks and invest it in the hands of either a water company or an autonomous water board. As water became an important source of income in the twentieth century, Cape Town's municipal history might have been very different if these attempts to dilute its control over water supply had been successful. This had been the route followed by cities such as Melbourne in Australia, which had its powers distributed amongst various authorities,<sup>(19)</sup> and to an extent, Johannesburg, with the creation of the Rand Water Board.<sup>(20)</sup>

There are however as many similarities as there are differences. Comparisons may be drawn between Cape Town and the experience of Bolton and Rochdale in their competition and conflict for the water resources of the hinterland,<sup>(21)</sup> or with Leeds where there were divisions over the choice of schemes.<sup>(22)</sup> But an underlying problem common to all cities, concerned the cost of augmenting supplies, which formed the basis of political conflict within

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(18) A.1-1907, Cape of Good Hope (Colony), Report of the Select Committee on the Southern Suburbs Water Supply Bill, p.94, ss.1125-1129.

(19) D.Dunstan, Governing the Metropolis. Politics, Technology and Social Change in a Victorian City: Melbourne 1850-1891, 1984.

(20) J. Shorten, The Johannesburg Saga, Johannesburg, 1970, p.571.

(21) J.Garrard, Leadership and power in Victorian Industrial Towns, pp.91-93.

(22) B.Barber, "Municipal Government in Leeds", pp.85-89.

their town councils. In Britain these often took place along the lines of party political allegiance, in Cape Town divisions within the town council were not overtly along political lines, but represented a split within the dominant classes rather than a conflict between different classes.

E.P.Hennock's analysis of local government in Britain during the Victorian era provides a useful tool in understanding the dynamics of municipal politics.<sup>(23)</sup> Hennock argues that divisions over expenditure that arose within town councils were the product of conflict over which type of business attitude should be dominant; that of caution or enterprise.<sup>(24)</sup> Put another way, this conflict may be described as one between 'improvers' and 'economists', which Hennock sees as a central issue in local government.<sup>(25)</sup> The economists, who advocated fiscal caution, came to the fore during economic depression or during periods when town councils had overextended themselves. Improvers thrived during times of economic boom or were sometimes stimulated by social necessity. This analysis may be applied to Cape Town, where Hymen Liberman would be a typical example of the economists, while his counterpart, John Parker, could be described as being representative of the improvers.

When Hennock's categories of improvers and economists are applied to Fraser's examination of the conflict arising from the Rivington Pike Scheme, this provides the basis for a further analogy which may extended to Cape Town's experience. Liverpool's Rivington Pike affair resembles both the conflict between the water and anti-water parties between 1904 and 1906 as well as the 1917 water referendum. As in the example of

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(23) E.P. Hennock, Fit and Proper Persons. Ideal and Reality in Nineteenth Century Urban Government, 1973.

(24) *ibid*, p.317.

(25) *ibid*.

Liverpool, the division between economists and improvers coincide with a substantial variation in the economic status of the anti-water and water parties. Fraser argues that in Liverpool, the 'Pikests' were generally drawn from the ranks of wealthy merchants and professional men while the 'Anti-Pikests' tended to be representative of shopkeepers and tradesmen who were opposed to increases in rates.<sup>(26)</sup> A similar, although less obvious class difference may be discerned amongst the dominant classes Cape Town. The anti-water party tended to represent smaller businessmen and householders in attempting to keep municipal expenditure at a minimum. Cape Town's experience represents a combination of both the Hennock and Fraser models, in that the conflict was based on differing economic attitudes within the dominant class, and to a certain extent, reflected divisions between the middle and working classes.

Further parallels may be drawn from the analysis of Hennock and Fraser. For example Hennock argues that "ignorant electors" were often mobilised against reform, a factor that was evident in both Liverpool and Cape Town where working classes resisted what they perceived to be exorbitant water schemes. In Cape Town working class resistance was deeply rooted in their alienation and isolation by racial and sanitation rhetoric, which had been utilised to mobilise middle class support for reform in the nineteenth century.

Ultimately, the improvers, which may be broadly identified with commerce, came to dominate Cape Town's unified council after 1913. The municipality's development of a hinterland water scheme in this period symbolises the beginning of the rise of a professional local government with the predominance of officials and expert opinion. Despite the transformation that was brought about by unification, the earlier conflicts over municipal and

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(26) D. Fraser, Power and Authority, pp.34-35.

sanitation reform left an indelible mark on municipal politics. Indeed the Steenbras versus Wemmerhoek debate of 1917 echoed half a century of the politics of water supply.

The role played by water supply in Cape Town's municipal history is not entirely unique, as it has been shown to have had a varying impact on the development of other major cities. In stressing these similarities and differences, it should be remembered that its real significance lies in the contribution it may make to a fuller understanding of Cape Town's history. While it has been argued that the issue of water supply should be linked to the broader process of urban history, it is also true that a model or pattern should be identified to facilitate the study of sanitation and municipal reform in other South African cities. Although such studies of water supply have been undertaken in some town's, they have been marred by the lack of an analytical approach.<sup>(27)</sup> Any such history should take into account geographic factors, as have been espoused by Cain, the political context of the local and central state; the underlying economic trend of industrialisation and economic cycles; as well as social factors such as urbanisation and class conflict.

More specific trends should also be taken into account when they commonly occur in histories of water supply. It has been noted that water supply became an issue when a sanitary threshold was reached. This is often underlined by the outbreak of a major fire which cannot be extinguished through lack of water, the outbreak of disease and epidemics, or the occurrence of a major drought. It is at this point that the form of control over water supply is determined, usually that of municipal authority or a government sponsored water board. Lack of finance often delayed progress, while many governments were unwilling to accept responsibility. The extension of municipal control over water

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(27) For example, A. de V. Minaar, "Graaff Reinet's Water Problems", Contree, Number 22, pp.26-28.

often brought political conflict within town councils, as it represented a source of considerable expenditure. Even where the demand for water supply is met, renewed conflict often arose from the fact that supply lagged behind demand. After the completion of major schemes, periods of complacency set in, compounding the crisis. Increased utilisation rates, or the rapid escalation of consumption which takes place after a city typically annexes its suburbs, creates new demands that were difficult to meet and which renewed political conflict.

These represent some of the patterns of the politics of water supply. The history of Cape Town's water supply echoes many of these themes, whereas other city's may only display a few. The real significance of the issue of water supply in Cape Town's history lies in the fact that it was inextricably linked to the development of its municipal government for an extended period of time. Furthermore it was bound up with emergent class and social relationships, which shaped the greater city.

#### WATER SUPPLY: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE.

The development of the Wemmershoek scheme in the mid 1950's at a cost of £8 000 0000 was the last time the issue of augmenting water supply became a public issue in Cape Town's municipal politics. Although water restrictions have been imposed at times, shortages have never reached the same proportions as those at the beginning of the century. Since the 1950's numerous schemes have been undertaken by the city and the state, drawing on a large area of the hinterland. The potential for further schemes in the Western Cape has decreased as the exploitation of water resources nears its potential. In the future competition



for these remaining resources may develop between the urban and rural areas, and even between cities, towns and regions, and once again become a source of political conflict.

As the next century approaches, it is anticipated that the limits of Cape Town's water resources will be tested once again. Political change has brought about a new phase of rapid urbanisation which will make new demands as standards of living rise and industrialisation takes place.' Some conception of the magnitude of these demands may be gleaned from the example of the new township of Khayelitsha which now absorbs most of the water from the old Steenbras dam, whose water no longer reaches the city.

As water resources are finite, it is fair to assume that future shortages will again become an issue in local government. In the vast informal settlements springing up around Cape Town, the lack of water supply and sanitation systems are already an issue. The provision of services for new urban developments is certain to place renewed strains on the city's economy. Questions concerning the ability of the underprivileged classes to pay for water and other services is likely to be drawn into the debate of the redistribution of wealth, with the rich being expected to subsidise the poor.

Another issue that may arise is the question of the privatisation of water supply. The privatisation of water authorities is related to the old water companies that once thrived in an era when municipalities did not have the ability to finance capital development. Indeed Cape Town may once again become forced to consider this option as increasing demands are made on its revenue.

Water supply has been shown to have had an enormous impact on

Cape Town's history. When we look to the past, and consider the future, we may well wonder what political turmoil may emerge from new and changing circumstances which will soon face the city. By examining the past it may be learnt that the problem of augmenting water supply involves far more than overcoming engineering problems such as developing tunnels, pipelines and gravitational schemes to squeeze ever last drop from the hinterland. The impact that it once had on the city's politics, economy and society may be experienced again.

## APPENDIX A

### SHORT BIOGRAPHIES OF LEADING PERSONALITIES

1. William Duncan-Baxter (1868-1960)

Born Dundee Scotland. Owned a large retail business in Cape Town. Was active in organised commerce and was president of the Cape Town Chamber of Commerce.(1916-18/1926-28) He was a member of the city council from 1904 and served as mayor in 1907-08. He was elected to the Cape Parliament in 1908 (Progressive)and to the Union Parliament (Gardens constituency) in 1910.(Unionist Party)

2. William Henry Black (1869-1922)

Born in Victoria, Australia. An architect and civil engineer by profession. He designed the Cape of Good Hope Seminary building, the Wynberg Town Hall and St. Lukes Church at Salt River Arrived in Cape Town 1892. Served as a city councillor.

3. Hyman Liberman (1854-1923)

Born in Poland and emigrated to Britain before arriving in Cape Town in 1873. A prominent grain and wine merchant. Served on city council from 1900-15. He was involved in relief work for refugees during the Anglo-Boer War. Mayor of Cape Town from 1903 to 1906.

4. John Parker (1866-1921)

Born in Scotland and arrived in Cape Town in 1883. A noted architect he designed the S.A. College School, the Great Synagogue in Gardens, the Civil Service Club, the Tivoli Music Hall, Rustenberg School and the Presbyterian Church in Mowbray. A founder member of the Cape Institute of Architects. He was elected to the Mowbray town council in 1898 and for Cape Town on several occasions

5. Sir John Woodhead (1832-1898)

Born in Yorkshire. Originally a ship's engineer before establishing an ironworks and merchant business in Cape Town. Elected on the city council in 1881 and focused on the water and drainage problem. Three times mayor of Cape Town.

APPENDIX B

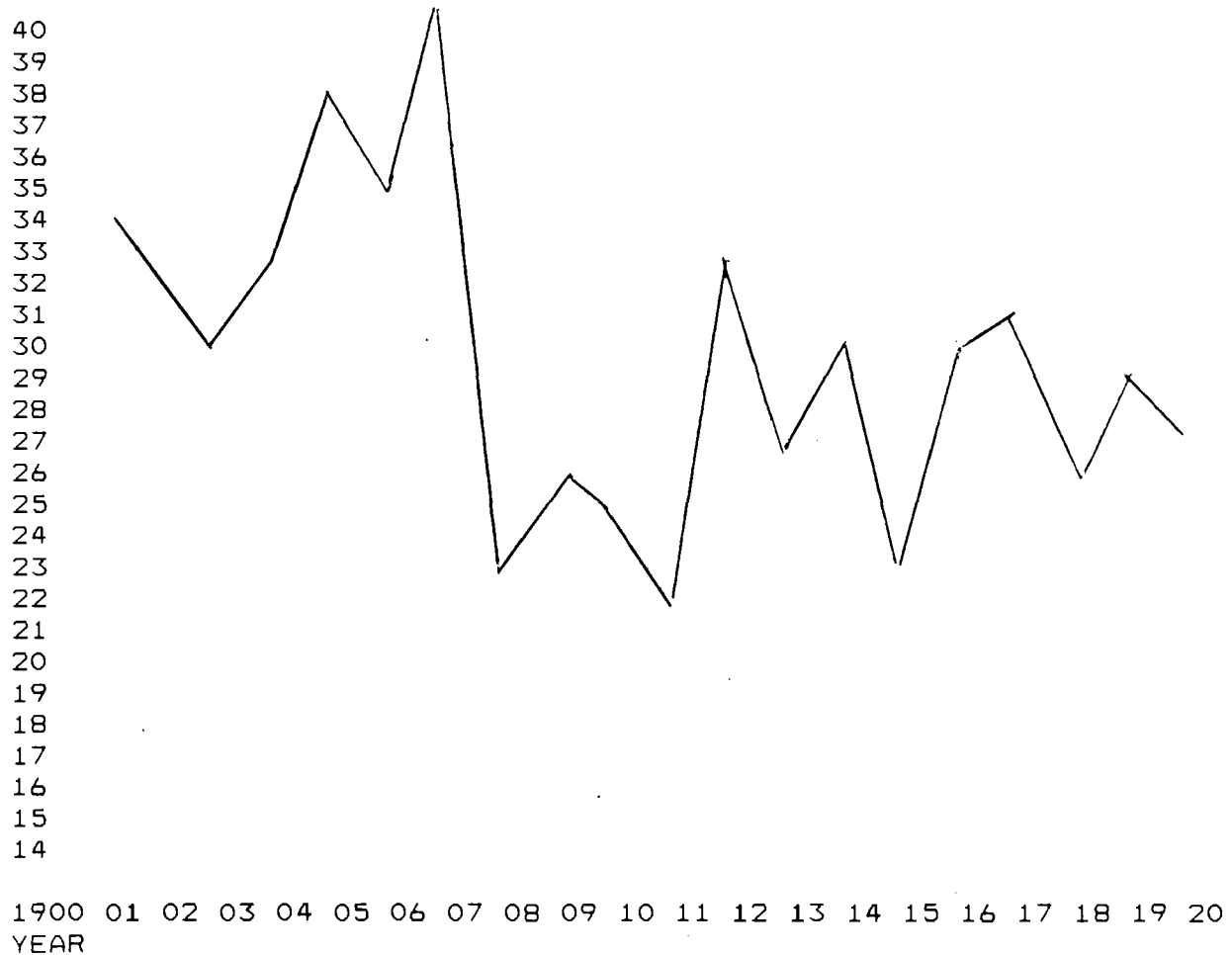
ADDITIONAL GRAPHS AND TABLES

1. Cape Town's rainfall 1900-1920.
2. Statistics for Cape Town's dams and reservoirs.
3. Mayor's of Cape Town 1867-1917.
4. Comparative water consumption of cities c.1915
5. Comparisons of Water Schemes proposed for Cape Town  
in 1805  
1905

NUMBER 1

AVERAGE ANNUAL MONTHLY RAINFALL OF CAPE TOWN 1900-1920

INCHES



SOURCE : MINUTE OF THE MAYOR, ANNUAL REPORT OF THE WATER ENGINEER, 1900-1920.

## NUMBER 2

## STATISTICS OF CAPE TOWN MAJOR RESERVOIRS AND DAMS 1850-1925

NAME	YEAR	COST (£)	CAPACITY (Gallons)
No.1 Reservoir	1849/52	2 700	2 500 000
No.2 Reservoir	1856/60	8 100	12 000 000
Molteno Rsrvr.	1877/86	96 000	43 000 000
Woodhead tunnel	1890/91	45 000	-
Woodhead Dam	1892/97	154 000	210 000 000
Mocke Rsrvr.	1896	2 870	200 000
Hely Hutchinson	1898/1904	200 000	200 000 000
Kloof Nek Rsrvr.	1907/08	25 700	3 000 000
Steenbras	1917/21	1 252 000	600 000 000
Steenbras Ext.	1924/28	1 124 000	5 991 000 000*

SOURCES: 3/Ct 1/4/4/4/6/1 Augmentation of Water Supplies;  
sub committee minutes, appointed 1 October 1914,  
Memoranda, "B" Existing Works, pp.10-15.  
Minute of the Mayor, 1898-1930

NUMBER 3

MAYOR'S OF CAPE TOWN 1867-1917

1867	G.J. de Korte	1893	J. Woodhead
1868	G.J. de Korte	1894	G. Smart
1869	G.J. de Korte	1895	J.W. Atwell
1870	G.J. de Korte	1896	J. Woodhead
1871	P.J. Stigant	1897	H. Boalch/ T. Ball
1872	G.J. de Korte	1898	T. Ball
1873	G.J. de Korte	1899	T. Ball
1874	P.J. Stigant	1900	T.J. O'Reilly
1875	P.U. Liebrant	1901	W. Thorne
1876	C. Lewis	1902	W. Thorne
1877	J. Phillip	1903	Sir W. Thorne
1878	J.C. Hofmeyer	1904	H. Liberman
1879	P.J. Kotzee	1905	H. Liberman
1880	P.J. Kotzee	1906	H. Liberman
1881	W. Flemming	1907	W.D. Baxter
1882	W. Flemming	1908	F.W. Smith
1883	C. Lewis	1909	Sir F.W. Smith
1884	P.J. Stigant	1910	Sir F.W. Smith
1885	T.J.C. Inglesby	1911	Sir F.W. Smith
1886	J. Woodhead	1912	H. Hands
1887	T.J. O'Reilly	1913	J. Parker
1888	D.C. De Waal	1914	J. Parker
1889	D.P. De V. Graaf	1915	H. Hands
1890	D.P. De V. Graaf	1916	H. Hands
1891	D.P. De V. Graaf	1917	H. Hands
1892	J.G. Mocke		

SOURCE: Minute of the Mayor, 1917.



## NUMBER 4

COMPARISON OF CONSUMPTION IN GALLONS PER HEAD IN SOUTH AFRICAN  
CITIES AND OTHER MAJOR CITIES IN THE WORLD. c.1915

TOWN	POPULATION	DAILY SUPPLY GALLONS	CONSUMPTION PER HEAD PER DAY
CHICAGO	1,698,000	322,620,000	190
BOSTON	560,900	80,209,000	143
NEW YORK	2,049,000	245,880,000	120
DURBAN	46,300	4,500,000	94
SAN FRANCISCO	343,000	25,039,000	73
PORT ELIZABETH	30,700	1,340,000	44
BRISBANE	129,600	5,520,000	43
SYDNEY	731,200	30,520,000	42
PERTH	91,500	3,630,000	40
WYNBERG	14,000	520,000	37
LONDON	6,940,000	222,080,000	32
LIVERPOOL	940,000	28,200,000	30
CAPE TOWN	151,900	4,400,000	29
CARDIFF	222,000	6,050,000	27
BRISTOL	377,000	9,802,000	26

SOURCE: 3/CT 1/4/4/4/6/1 Augmentation of water supplies:  
Minutes 1914-1915.

NUMBER 5

COMPARISON OF DIFFERENT WATER SCHEMES PROPOSED FOR  
CAPE TOWN'S HINTERLAND.

SCHEME	DISTANCE FROM CAPE TOWN	CAPACITY MILLION GALLONS	COST* L
STEENBRAS	38 miles	2000	639 400
PALMIET	44 miles	1500	860 000
ZACHARIAS HOEK	41 miles	1600	1 262 000
WEMMERS HOEK	43 miles	2600	1 256 000
BERG RIVER	44 miles	1000	910 000
WARMBERG	47 miles	1000	860 000

\* Cost based on a million gallon a day scheme

SOURCE: 3/CT 9/5 Final Report of the Joint Water Committee,  
1905, page 29.

NUMBER 6

CAPE TOWN'S WATER CONSUMPTION 1900-1913 (gallons per day)

1900	698 389 330
1901	773 881 968
1902	817 435 700
1903	905 652 000
1904	919 920 000
1905	964 732 000
1906	970 444 000
1907	918 088 000
1908	855 681 000
1909	807 353 000
1910	832 347 000
1911	913 999 000
1912	939 736 000
1913	972 037 000

SOURCE: Minute of the Mayor 1900-1913  
Annual Report of the City Engineer

#### A NOTE ON SOURCES

A wide range of sources were used in compiling the dissertation. Archival sources yielded rich detail, especially engineers reports and technical reports of various waterworks committees, but were of limited value due to the political emphasis of the study.

Government publications, particularly the reports of parliamentary select committee's, amounting to over 3000 pages of evidence, were a major source of information, which is ironic given that the government generally avoided involving itself with municipal affairs. These provide clear evidence of the conflicting attitudes to municipal reform within the dominant class. The published mayoral minutes were also useful for providing an overview, avoiding convoluted petty politics that often obscured the facts.

Newspapers were another valuable source of information for commentary on political conflict. Newspapers such as the Cape Times, were deeply involved in the debate over sanitation and and municipal reform and therefore provided a window into the minds of the reformers. A more unusual source are the numerous cartoons which underline the importance of the issue of water in local politics as well as provide insight into personalities and

capture contemporary emotions.

Unpublished theses on Cape Town provided a vital link in developing an argument as this dissertation covers a wide period and is therefore supported by their findings.

Published literature and journal articles were used for comparative purposes as well as for developing an understanding of municipal government.

Photographs were used as visual statements to convey an impression of the scale of the water schemes, an aspect that was not emphasised in the text.

## SOURCES

### 1. Unpublished Sources

#### A. Archival Material

### 2. Printed Official Sources

#### A. Government Publications

#### B. Municipality of Cape Town

#### C. Other

### 3. Contemporary Newspapers and Periodicals

### 4. Contemporary Published Literature

### 5. General Literature

#### A. Unpublished Theses

#### B. Published Literature

#### C. Journal and Other Papers

#### D. Reference Works

#### E. Pamphlets and Magazines

### 6. Maps

### 7. Photographs

SOURCE LIST

1. UNPUBLISHED MANUSCRIPTS AND PRIVATE PAPERS

A. GOVERNMENT ARCHIVES- CAPE OF GOOD HOPE

(i) 3/CT Series: Archives of the Municipality of Cape Town

3/CT 1/5/6/1/1 :Cape Peninsula Unification Minute Book,  
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1 October 1914 re: Augmentation of Water  
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3/CT 1/4/4/4/1-21 : Waterworks Committee: Minutes (1913-  
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Committee: Minutes (1899-1913).

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1899.

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Peninsula water supply (1903).

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SMW 33 :Papers received Wemmershoek 1909-1913.

SMW 35 :Walter Steyn Case.

SMW 36 :Papers Received Steenbras Water Scheme(1900-01).

SMW 39 :Wemmershoek 1907-1910 (Papers Received).

SMW 65 :Sundry Papers and Reports.

SMW 67 :Water Schemes and investigations, 1902-1907, Cape Town Committee: Notices of proceedings of meetings with Cape Town Council.

SMW 69 :Diverse: Evidence regarding Water Bill (1907).

SMW 70 :Memoranda in connection with Wemmershoek (1907-1908)

SMW ADD 1/42 : Secretary, Cape Town District Waterworks Co.Ltd. Papers re: Cape Town District Waterworks Company, Ltd. versus Woodstock and Claremont Municipalities re: taking over of Waterworks Arbitration Case (1897-1900).

SMW ADD 2/4 : Secretary, Claremont and Woodstock Joint Committee: Report for the Joint Waterworks Committee on the affairs of the Cape Town District Waterworks Company, Ltd., 1889-1899.

SMW ADD 3/1-4 : Secretary, Suburban Joint Water and Drainage Committee (1905-1908), Minutes 1905-1910.



SMW ADD 3/6 : Secretary, Suburban Joint Water and Drainage Committee: Report of the Suburban Joint Water and Drainage Committee to the Municipal Councils of Claremont, Mowbray, Rondebosch, and Woodstock (1907).

(iii) Woodstock Municipality Series 3A/6

3A/6 volume 101 : Suburban Municipal Waterworks.

(iv) Other

CWC : Secretary Water Committee Cape Town 1834-1840.

CHB : Table Bay Harbour Board

LCB : Legislative Council Minutes and Appendices 1859

## B. UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN ARCHIVES

William Duncan Baxter Papers : Cape Town Municipal Matters, C.2.1-C.2.103

J.T. Wylde Papers : Reports and Minutes of Evidence of a Government Enquiry into the purchase of land bt Woodstock Municipality for a water scheme, July-August 1908.

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7.     PHOTOGRAPHS

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